STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES WITH RESPECT TO COLLEGE OF CHOICE IN KWAZULU-NATAL

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DEDICATION

To my late dad ‘Mfanawethu Raphael Mbambo’, you will forever be remembered in our life, this study is dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

The South African Further Education and Training (FET) sector is facing the challenge of being rated and considered by many young school leavers and the community as a second choice institution, while universities are their first priority. This study aimed to investigate and explore student's expectations and perceptions of Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) with respect to their choice of college. The main objective of this research was to identify students' expectations and perceptions, and the factors that encourage enrolment at FET colleges, as well as to identify the different expectations and perceptions, according to demographic factors.

The SERVQUAL model was employed to establish students' expectations against perceptions of FET colleges in KZN. The study design was quantitative in nature, using a descriptive technique, cross sectional, and collected data through the application of non-probability sampling with census, quota and convenience sampling methods being utilized to obtain data from a sample of 301 respondents. Data collected from the respondents were analysed with SPSS version 20.0 and interpreted with the use of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The questionnaire measured students' expectations and perceptions in five dimensions of service, namely tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. The findings demonstrate that students had higher expectations of service quality with lower perceptions of the actual service received. The negative gaps within the five SERVQUAL service quality dimensions, implies that the students were dissatisfied with the level of service in their FET colleges. The gaps, from largest to smallest, were Reliability, Assurance, Tangible, Responsiveness, and Empathy.

FET College management is advised to attend to these above-mentioned gaps and to ensure that the necessary strategies are immediately implemented, as these would improve the FET brand and ultimately position FET Colleges as the institution of first choice in KZN.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AET : Adult Education and Training
AsgiSA : Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
DoE : Department of Education
DHET : Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT : Durban University of Technology
EIS : Electronic Information Services
FET : Further Education and Training
FE : Further Education
FETMIS : Further Education and Training Management Information System
HSRC : Human Science Research Council
HE : Higher Education
ICT : Information Communication Technology
Jipsa : Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Authority
KZN : KwaZulu-Natal
MUT : Mangosuthu University of Technology
NSA : National Skills Authority
NSC : National Senior Certificate
NQF : National Qualification Framework
NCv : National Certificate of Vocational
NATED : National Education
QCL : Quality of College Life
RSA : Republic of South Africa
SA : South Africa
SETA's : Sector Education and Training Authorities
SERVQUAL : SERVice QUALity
USA : United State of America
UK : United Kingdom
UoT : University of Technology
UKZN : University of KwaZulu-Natal

UNISA : University of South Africa

UNIZULU : University of Zululand

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Many young South Africans and adults, on completing their education at high school level, consider studying at Comprehensive Universities or Universities of Technology rather than in the Further Education Training sector. According to Ceza (2008: 2), such students are likely to have been rejected by the universities of their choice and FET is their second alternative. This sector is regarded and perceived as a last option for students, at which to pursue training. Ceza (2008: 2) is of the opinion that it is because of their practical nature, which leads to them being viewed by most parents as most suitable for students who are not mentally gifted but who are practically gifted.

In South Africa, 152 technical colleges, with 200 delivery sites across the country, merged in September 2001 to form 50 FET colleges. According to the Department of Education, this merger was decided on with a view to improving and uplifting the standard of education, in order to meet the challenges of the labour market and for the enhancement of co-operative governance, co-operative management, co-operative leadership and co-operative education (Akoojee and McGrath 2008).

In 2007, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced the National Certificate (Vocational) (NC (v)) curriculum. These courses were regarded as being attractive to ambitious students (DoE 2007: 5). However, one of the challenges that has to be dealt with, is the poor public perception of FET college programmes (DoE 2008: 32). In 2008, the Department of Education stated that there were 400 000 students enrolled at FET colleges (RSA-Doe: 2008). The 2010 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) ministerial report revealed that this number decreased to 220 000 students.

The Department of Education (DoE) wants to increase this number to one million by 2014/15 (DoE 2007: 5). According to Akoojee (2009: 39), the fact that this number is

decreasing means that the one million target envisaged in ministerial speeches is unlikely to be achieved.

1.2. Problem statement

FET colleges are struggling with enrolments and student intake (Akoojee and McGrath 2008: 141). The majority of students registered with the FET sector are mostly referred by universities to FET colleges. Students do not perceive and choose FET colleges as an institution of priority after completion of high school. Akoojee points out those colleges have no influence over attracting student intake (Akoojee 2009: 128)

The phasing out of N4 to N6 certificates (curriculum) by FET for new the National Certificate (Vocational) – (NCv) has resulted in a decrease in enrolment intake from 400 000 to 220 000 (Cosser 2011: 71). The new programme may be misunderstood by the target recipients.

This indicates an overall negative perception of FET, as the preferred choice of further education and training. FET's future, as a preferred institution, is uncertain and, unless FET colleges can identify the reasons, it will be difficult to meet their enrolments goals. Therefore, the research problem involves FET colleges not understanding students' attitudes to FET colleges.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. Main objective

The main purpose of this study is to explore student expectations and perceptions about the Further Education and Training Colleges with specific reference to college of choice.

1.3.2. Sub-objectives

Sub-objective 1: To identify expectations of students towards FET.
Sub-objective 2: To identify perceptions of students towards FET.
Sub-objective 3: To identify factors influencing enrolments in FET colleges.

Sub-objective 4: To identify demographic differences according to student perceptions and expectations in FET.

1.4. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1 What are the students' expectations regarding FET?
2 What are the students' perceptions regarding FET?
3 Which factors are encouraging and discouraging enrolments at FET colleges?
4 What issues prevent FET colleges from being an institution of first choice?
5 Do expectations and perceptions differ according to demographics factors?

1.5. Hypotheses

HI: There is relationship between student demographics and student expectations and perceptions towards FET colleges in KZN.

1.6. Rationale for the study

FET intends to increase student enrolment to one million by 2014/5 and a further four million by 2030. According to Bitzer and de Bruin (2004: 119) assessing students' existing knowledge, attitudes, and their expectations help the educationalists to plan, organise and evaluate what influences expectation factors. Knowing what students expect from education institutions is essential for FET colleges, as it improves their long-term relationships (Sanchez, Pencino and Rodriguez 2011: 345). Students expect higher education institution to deliver what they promise (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithml 2003)

The decision by prospective students to register with a higher education institution is influenced by the way in which the individuals (prospective students) perceive the desired service. According to Etzel, Walker, Michael and Stanton (2004: 105), perception plays an important role in the identification of alternatives and influencing consumers in deciding whether to purchase or not, as in the case of education in the

FET sector. Taylor (1996) suggests that the value of paying attention to the learners perspective is seen as the proposition that “If we have some understanding of their perspective, we are better placed to make sense of their engagement with and reactions to educational settings” while this sector is in the transition phase.

Therefore, identifying student expectations and perceptions about FET will help to improve the perceptions of the FET image of potential students, and meet the goal of increasing enrolments.

1.7. Delimitations and Limitations of the study

1.7.1. Delimitations

Due to time and financial constraints, it was impossible to conduct this study in all 50 FET colleges’ in South Africa. Therefore this study was limited to the KwaZulu-Natal province.

This study was also limited to full-time FET students between the ages of 16 to 24 and above 24 years.

1.7.2. Limitations

The study will be restricted to KwaZulu-Natal in all nine FET Colleges namely, Coastal FET College; Elangeni FET College; Esayidi FET College; Majuba FET College; Mnambithi FET College; Mthashana FET College; Thekwini FET Colleges; Umgungudlovu FET College and Umfolozi FET College. *(Justification is set out in section 4.4.5 Table: 4.1)*

1.8. Summary of Research Methodology

The research methodology applied in this study, includes the research type, population, sampling, questionnaire instrument, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability.

1.8.1. Research type

This study aims to determine student's expectations and perceptions of the FET sector; the study conducted was therefore quantitative. According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005: 124) quantitative research is generally concerned with counting and measuring. Since this study measures the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion, and attitude of FET college students, at a single-point in time, a descriptive method was appropriate. Dabholkar, Shephered and Thorne (2000: 148), state that the majority of empirical studies conducted to measure service quality have been cross-sectional, where both expectations and perceptions were measured after the service had been delivered. Therefore, this study was a cross-sectional survey, as it was done once, in order to give the perspective of findings at one point in time.

1.8.2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of respondents (students) who met the following criteria:

- Registered NCv - Level 2 - Level 4 to Nated N3-N6 Full-Time; and
- They must be 18 years old or older.

Three types of sampling methods were applied in this study, quota, convenience and census. The study was based in the KZN province due to this province having the second largest population in South Africa, and it also has a large number of FET colleges. All FET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) were therefore included in the study i.e. a census. Quota sampling was used, this method was used to select the actual number of respondents per college/campus (Table: 4.4) and convenience sampling was used to select the respondents. This method was used to select actual students according to the quotas to complete the questionnaires, with the result that this method, members/respondents are selected based on being accessible and available.

1.8.3. Data collection

Permission to conduct research in all KZN-FET colleges was granted by the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal (DoE-KZN). Data was collected through questionnaires, which were administered by the researcher to respondents in all KZN-

FET colleges, with a covering letter informing respondents (students) about the nature and the purpose of the research. The measuring instrument was the 22-item SERVQUAL instrument. Over the years numerous, studies have validated this instrument. Zafropoulous and Vrand (2007: 36-37) proposed SERVQUAL as an appropriate instrument for service quality in the context of education and higher institutions.

1.8.4. Data analysis

The primary data collected from a sample size of 301, were captured onto a Microsoft Excel spread-sheet and then converted for analysis with the statistical software package SPSS, version 20.0. On completion of the data entry, data was verified and descriptive and inferential statistics were extracted from the study.

1.8.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability measurement, reliability analysis was employed to test internal consistency for each factor e.g. Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Kent 2007: 141). Furthermore, a pilot test was done to refine and assess the questionnaires for face validity (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2003: 309). A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted with 10 N6 students.

1.9. Chapter Outline

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

A brief discussion of what this study entails is outlined in this chapter. The problem statement, study aim, and objectives are discussed as are delimitations and limitations.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review- FET Landscape

A literature review of various sources and authors provides an overview of FET Education. The FET Sector, perceptions and expectations are also discussed.

CHAPTER 3: Literature Review - Marketing and Higher Education

This chapter provides a holistic overview of marketing and higher education both nationally and globally. Extensive analysis of customer expectation and perception of service is provided as well as the usage and the application of the SERVQUAL model in the education context.

CHAPTER 4: Research Methodology

In this chapter, the research type, sampling method applied, and the data collection procedures, as well as data analysis, are explained.

CHAPTER 5: Data Analysis

Collected data is analysed in this chapter, in terms of descriptive analysis and inferential statistics.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion of findings

This chapter details the research findings, by means of discussing the obtained data in line with the study aims and objectives, relative to the literature

1.10. Conclusion

Chapter one focused on the background and the concepts of this study. This chapter presented the research problem with regards to FET colleges in KZN, the research objectives, methodology of the research and the chapter structure of the study.

In Chapter 2, the literature review of the customer service quality in FET colleges, student's enrolment as well as the implication within the FET colleges will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO
FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES (FET) LANDSCAPE

2.1. Introduction

In chapter one, the aims, study objectives, research design and research chapter outlines were discussed. This chapter focussed on setting the foundation and better understanding of FET colleges in SA, the merger of 152 technical public FET colleges, and the impact student enrolment has on the FET sector.

The literature also highlights the importance of student expectations and perception of service institutions such as Further Education (FE) in the UK. This chapter indicates the importance of quality, as the means of student retention, within the college, starting with a description of the formulation of student aspirations towards higher institutions of learning in SA, then concludes with the discussions of FET sector implication.

2.2. South African Education System: Enrolment planning issues

During secondary school years of studying, the majority of young South Africans formulates their higher educational aspirations with Comprehensive Universities or Universities of Technology's in mind not with FET colleges. In KZN, the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2011 received about 57 000 applications. This did not account for those students who walked into the campus searching for placement to study. According to Bawa (2011) this figure goes up 70 000, for only 5 500 available spaces. Once these students have been turned down and rejected by universities, they find themselves at FET colleges as an alternative institution, as FET are regarded and perceived as the second choice institution at which to pursue a career. According to Ceza 2008: 20) this can be ascribed to their practical nature, which leads FETs to be viewed by most parents as being suitable for students who are not mentally but rather, practically gifted.

2.3. Establishment of FET sector

The South African public FET sector is positioned between the General Education and Higher Education sectors, or between schooling and the world of work Fisher Jaff and Powell (2003) and, Bisschoff and Nkoe (2005: 204). The central mission of FET is to reach constituencies that have historically been excluded from education and training opportunities and to promote artisans (Bisschoff and Nkoe 2005: 204).

Given South African history, due to apartheid which resulted in poverty, unemployment and inequality facing South Africans population has a great impact influence to student's retention and pursuing one's in education. An estimate neither of over 2.8 million young people who are unemployed, nor in education and training are of the great concern in ministry of Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). In response to this social engineering crisis the National Planning for FET Colleges aims at targeting:

- Unemployed Matriculants;
- Unemployed Youths with Grades 11, 10 and 9;
- Grade nine learners who have the intellectual maturity to succeed in the NC (v) programmes; and
- Adults who (1) are unemployed but need specific skills related to their job performance; (2) wish to enrol in the NC(v) programme; (3) wish to enrol for an AET qualification; and (4) wish to do an a entrepreneurial development programme (Cosser 2011).

Currently, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training in South African FET colleges is embarking on promoting FET colleges, in order to increase student enrolments, by recruiting one million students in 2014/2015. The emphasis is on each individual FET college to market its programme offering because each college is an individual brand with a variety of services (RSA-DoE 2008: 28) based on:

location; programme offered and which campus; financial aid and other students support; partnership with industries; and uniqueness.

2.4. Merger of FET Colleges in South Africa.

It has been more than a decade since the South African educational institutional landscapes went through immense changes. Technical colleges have been replaced by FET colleges, Technikons have merged with other Technikons to form Universities of Technology and Universities and Technikons merged to form Comprehensive Universities. This process was initiated and implemented between 2000 and 2004, with the view of meeting both NQF and industry specific needs, in order to improve the South African economy by reaching government objective for equity, efficiency and development (Bonnema and van Der Waldt, 2008: 315) and (Remond, 2010: 24). This merger of public tertiary institutions resulted in the shut-down of nursing and teachers colleges, with the view of allowing universities to offer more improved education and training qualifications for these two professions (Cosser 2011: 70).

The South African FET Act 98 of 1998 created a new institutional landscape path for 152 technical colleges, with 200 delivery sites across the country, to merge and form 50 FET colleges nationally. According to the Department of Education, this merger was decided on to improve and uplift the standard of education to meet the challenges of the labour market and enhancement of co-operative governance, co-operative management, co-operative leadership, and co-operative education (Akoojee and McGrath 2008).

The view in this reformation of FET colleges, was that in combining smaller, weaker institutions with stronger institutions, it would develop economies of scale and create capacity within colleges to reach more students (Department of Education, 2007: 4), in addition to offering a wider range of programmes. It would ultimately position the FET colleges better, to meet social and economic demands (Fisher et al, 2003: 323), and also cater for the wide-ranging needs of those seeking employment, returning to learning or requiring re-training, vocational preparation and access to higher education. The FET colleges, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA's), and National Skills Authority have been incorporated within the recently established DHET (Cosser 2011: 70)

2.5. FET Colleges in: KwaZulu-Natal

During the FET, merger process in 2001, the KZN province which is the second largest province with regards to population, had only 27 public technical colleges, which merged to form nine FET colleges in the province. According to the DoE, KZN is the only province with the bigger number of FET college nine followed by the Eastern Cape eight, Gauteng provinces eight as well as Limpompo with seven, Western Cape six others between four to two FET colleges in their clusters DoE (2002: 62).

The FET colleges in KZN are situated in both rural and urban areas. It can been argued that urban FET colleges are in tight competition as opposed to those FET colleges situated in rural areas, the major competition for urban arises from private colleges, University of Technology and Comprehensive Universities cities and townships). These nine FET colleges compete with two Universities of Technology (UoT), i.e. Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), as well as two Comprehensive Universities i.e. University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the University of South-Africa (UNISA)

These FET colleges are accessible to students who use both public and private transport, as well as the train; they also cater for students who walk from home to campuses. With the closure of teaching and nursing colleges, vacant premises and buildings were automatically incorporated to accommodate these newly merged FET colleges in 2001.

2.6. FET College - Curriculum

The 2006 Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) and Joint initiative for Priority Skills (Jipsa) identified skilled Artisans and Vocational Skill and NC (v), which replaced National Technical Education (NATED), (Department of Education 2007(c).

Figure 2.1: FET Curricula

National Vocational Certificate (NCV) L2 – L4 ❖ New Curricula	National Technical Education (NATED) N1 – N6 ❖ REPORT 191-Old Curricula
▪ Civil Engineering and Building Construction ▪ Drawing office practice	▪ Art – Music
▪ Education and Development ▪ Electrical Infrastructure Construction	▪ Business Studies
▪ Engineering and Related Design	▪ Educare and Social Services
▪ Finance, Economics and Accounting	
▪ Hospitality	▪ Engineering Studies
▪ Information Technology and Computer Science	
▪ Management	
▪ Marketing ▪ Mechatronics	
▪ Office Administration	▪ General Education
▪ Primary Agriculture ▪ Process Instrumentation ▪ Process Plant Operations	
▪ Tourism ▪ Transport & Logistics (offered-as-from 2012) ▪ (Primary Health to be offered in 2013)	▪ Utility Studies

Source: RSA – DHET : (2011)

The new curricula National Certificate (Vocational) (NC (v)) on the left of Figure: 2.2 which was introduced in 2007, was meant to replace the N1-N3 NATED 190/91 programme. These courses were regarded as being attractive to ambitious students with an outcome based orientation which marries theoretical and practical education (DoE 2007: 5).

In order to develop and deliver these new programmes, the earmarked government funding of R600 million recapitalisation injected to FET was also intended for the

development of human resources, refurbishment, infrastructure, equipment, operational systems and curriculum related requirements.

According to Cosser (2011: 71), the phasing out of N4 to N6 qualifications for the confinement of FET provision to NQF level two to four programmes, was cemented by the introduction of the (NC(v)) as a parallel qualification to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in the schooling sector. This has resulted in a gap in education with negative consequences, specifically in skills development. Further, the obvious negative consequence is the absence of the NQF level five which gives universities the advantage of being the only institutions that offer certificates, diplomas and degrees, which are arguably their métier (Cosser 2011: 71).

Van Rooyen (2009: 2) is of the opinion that, for the FET to succeed, the DHET must revise the NATED curricula, with much input from industry and leave the N4 to N6 courses in the system. At present, FET colleges are running both NC (v) and NATED programmes. However, it was only once the DHET realised that students were not buying into the (NC (v)) programme; that the decision was taken to further extend the offering of N4 and N6 qualifications programme in FET (RSA-DoE 2010: 4).

2.7. Student enrolments in FET

The development of an admission process is to select and screen out students before or after actual registration for a particular course or programme, and is of great importance in any Higher Education Institution. In South African Higher Education Institutions and other developing countries apply this process, with the view that accepting students of low-probability of success is considered as a disservice for both them and their peers (Pharr and Lawrence 2007: 162). In KZN, the applications to study at HE institutions are channelled through a CAO, according to Bawa (2011). This method allows students to choose up to six programmes. However, student enrolment figures in the FET sector have been fluctuating, since from 2002. Due to the complexity of the programmes offered at FET's, academic researchers who have investigated students enrolments in this sector, struggle to provide reliable student enrolment data.

Contributing factors include that of programme duration (trimester, semester and annual) and student attendance (Part Time and Full-Time).

The FET sector has not succeeded in attracting and admitting larger numbers of learners, due to various aspects, according to Akoojee and McGrath (2008: 141; Cosser 2011: 71 and Akoojee 2009a: 128). A 2010 Human Science Research Council (HSRC) data audit report states that, from 2002 -2009, there have been flat and declining student's enrolments in FET colleges (Table2.1).

Table 2.1: Total Enrolments and staffing, FET colleges, 2002-2009

	Educators	**Students headcounts**
2002	7,088	406,144
2004	6,477	394,027
2005	6,407	377,584
2006	7,096	361,186
2007	5,987	320,053
2008	5,753	418,053
2009	6,255	420,475

Sources: DoE 'Statistics at a Glance', Powell and Hall, 2004; DoE, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2010.

However, after four years of experiencing a decline in student enrolment, student numbers increased to 31% in 2008, with no feasible explanation for this increment.

According to the HSRC, these figures may be unreliable (Cosser et al 2011: 46). For the purpose of this study, the only available and reliable data were obtained from the HSRC which pinpoints and draws a comparison between two sources of data: Department of Higher Education and Training – Further Education and Training Management Information System (DHET-FETMIS) and Human Science Research Council (HSRC-AUDIT) (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Comparison of core datasets: FETMIS versus HSRC audit, 2007-2010 data

	Total 'N' enrolments		Total 'NC(V)' Enrolments		'Other' enrolments		Total enrolled	
	DHET FEMIS	HSRC AUDIT	DHET FETMIS	HSRC AUDIT	DHET FETMIS	HSRC AUDIT	DHET FETMIS	HSRC AUDIT
2007	245,230	415,376	14,999	31,414	36,903	45,449	297,132	492,239
2008	178,086	328,486	16,909	81,742	37,631	41,250	232,626	451,478
2009	175,999	250,850	70,279	166,469	43,264	42,638	289,542	459,957
2010	169,083	81,469	130,061	122,257	40,420	40,520	299,864	284,766

Sources: DHET (2011); HSRC (2011)

However, the comparison datasets in Table 2.2 do not seem to correspond with one another (Cosser at el. 2011: 46). As a result the HSRC gives a brief summary and cautions usage of this data. Of six reason defined, three were noted for the purpose of this study:

- Total enrolment growth has not topped 400 000 since 2002 (Table 2.1 and 2.2), New NC (V) enrolments have not been large enough to compensate for the drop in 'N' enrolments or the overall increase in size;
- The 'N' course self-reporting in the HSRC audit by college management from 2007-2009, is clearly upwardly exaggerated. The 81 469 'N' enrolments recorded in June 2010 reflect only a partial measure and appears to be an under-estimation, as it does not reflect the 'N' enrolment which occurred in the second trimester, between July and December 2010 (Table: 2.2) and
- In contrast, the HSRC audit and FETMIS aggregate for NC(v) enrolments vary considerably in preceding years. FETMIS enrolments of only 16 909 in the second year of NC(V) implementation appears incorrect with 70 279 in its third year (Cosser 2011: 47).

Table 2.3, clearly shows an aggregate enrolment at FET colleges which remained flat from 2007-2010, which was comprised of a total of 332 580 headcount enrolments, despite the policy aim of increasing enrolments to one million by 2014/15, despite extensive financial support through the Recapitalisation Programme (Cosser 2011: 48).

Table 2.3: Total enrolments, FET college sector, 2007-2010

	Total 'N' enrolments	Total 'NC(V)' enrolments	Other enrolments	Total enrolled
2007	245,230	31,414	45,449	**322,093**
2008	178,086	81,742	41,250	**301,078**
2009	175,999	166,469	42,638	**385,106**
2010	169,803	122,257	40,520	**332,580**

Sources: 'N' enrolments data: DHET (2011); NC(V) and Other enrolment data: HSRC (2011)

The Department of Education report, states that this sector had 400 000 students enrolled at FET colleges (RSA-Doe: 2008), and ascribes the decrease in student numbers to poor public perception of FET programmes (DoE 2008: 32).

In 2010, the minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Blade Nzimande at a round table summit held in Johannesburg, announced that the number of students registered in FET had decreased from 400 000 to 220 000, with under 100 000 in private colleges Akoojee (2009b: 39) asserts that the fact that this number is decreasing means that the one million target envisaged in ministerial speeches, is unlikely to be achieved.

2.7.1. Student's Choice of Higher Education

Overall student's positive perception regarding higher education institutions empowers them to make informed decision as to which institution to choose to register at, with amicable expectations that the institution will meets their desired needs.

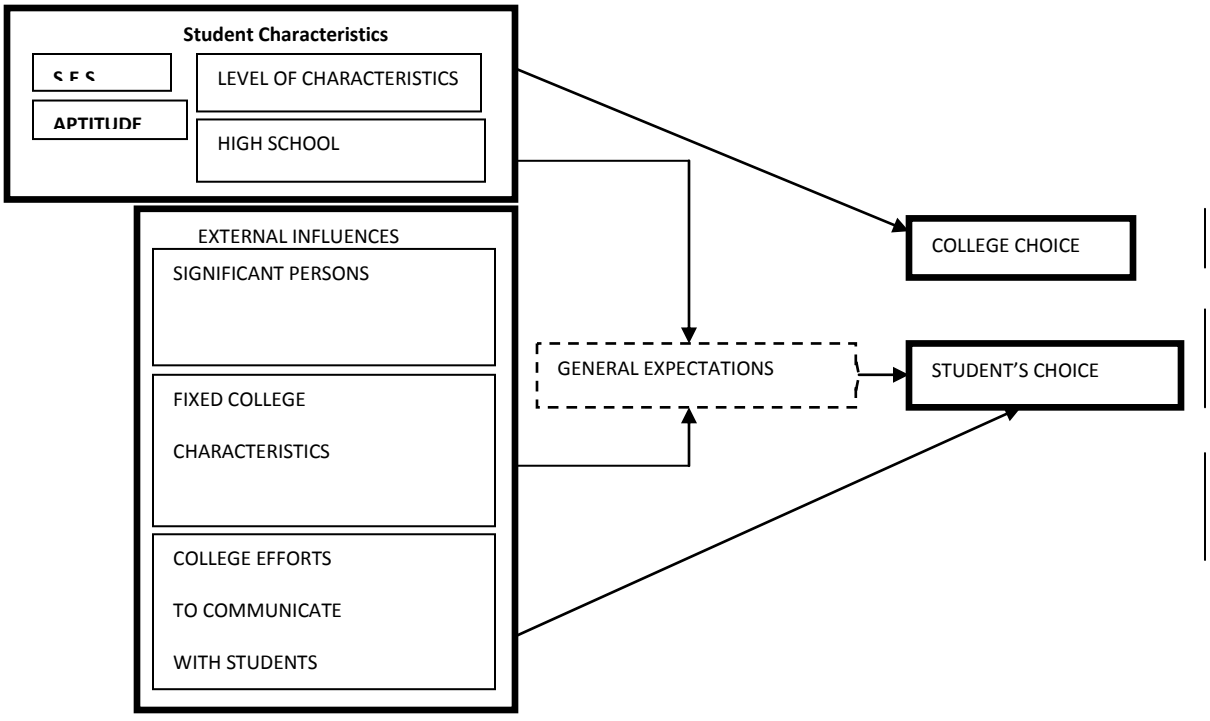
Extensive research studies have been undertaken on factors that have an impact on the choice of institution. Recent and previous academics studies, locally and abroad, point out that, among the factors that influence student choice of an institution, are that of an institutions image, branding and reputation, quality of teaching, financial aid and scholarships, location of the institution, student support facilities, academic and administrations issues, admission requirement and Quality of College Life (QCL). These factors have been shown, among others, to contribute to prospective students decision

as to which higher institution to attend **(**Russell (2005: 66; Pillay 2010: 71; Ivy 2001: 276; Chapman 1981; de Jager and du Plooy 2006: 12 and Yu and Lee 2008: 270).

Bontrager (2004: 9) points out that the primary goal of student recruitment, refers to the extent of a student's academic preparedness, career aspirations and the general expectations of what the institutions has to offer. In addition to these factors, student characteristics also influence the institution of choice.

An Australian study has shown that career preparation, academic reputation, socio economic status, school type and academic merit are the factors that influence university choice (Martin 1996: 3). To understand student' educational aspirations prior to deciding on a higher education of choice, Chapman's longitudinal models in (Figure: 2.2) suggest that it is necessary to take both the student background and current characteristics with external influences, into account (Chapman 1981: 492).

Figure 2.2: Student Influence towards College of Choice



Source: Chapman, 1981: 492

It is necessary to consider all possible factors that influence students and treat them with caution during recruitments in the FET sector. Acknowledging factors such as administrative efficiency, a smooth registration process, perceptions regarding corruption and stable management, are usually perceived to be external to the marketing and recruitment efforts, whereas these factors are highly rated by students (Pillay 2010: 75).

2.7.2. Students perception lesson from UK Further Education (FE)

Student perceptions and expectations towards public FET colleges, in South Africa, are not new, and are experienced at Further Education (FE) institutions in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) – Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and the United State of America (USA - Community College). Since the inception of the Further Education act in 1993 in the UK, studies show that student's perceptions towards UK universities and colleges have changed. Students perceive service quality mechanism as generic as an element (physical environment or the availability of academic staff) which varies over three to four years of study (Oldfield and Baron 2000: 85).

In their study of student perception feedback, Ahmad, Helms and Raiszadeh (2001: 12), state that teacher performance are evaluated by students, and these evaluations and opinions are used to provide faculty ratings. These, in turn, tends to affect decision making at the administrative level, concerning faculty salary increase, retention, promotion, pre-tenure and post-tenure reviews (Ahmad et al. 2001: 12).

On other hand Maull and Postlethwaite (2007) are of the opinion that students' changing perceptions might be affected by student and tutor disposition, curriculum, resources, broad aspects of college policy and the overall Further Education (FE) framework (Maull and Postlethwaite 2007: 429).

2.8. Image and reputation of FET Colleges

The poor public perception of South African FET colleges and their image has been among the factors contributing to the slow growth in student intake, attracting learners and the community's considering this sector as an institution of first choice. Ceza (2008: 2), points out that, it is their practical nature, which leads them to be viewed by most parents as being suitable for students who are not mentally but practically gifted. The conclusion is that institutional image and its reputation plays a pivotal role in attracting students to register.

While the positive institutional image and its reputation both attracts students and the community to make informed decision to enrol at that institution image and reputation are not the same. These two concepts, although related differ according to Tait and der Jager (2009: 1023), in that image can be created, whereas reputation is earned. An image according to Koza Kas, Kim and Moffich (2001: 207) is decided by the organisation's audiences and the organisation itself, through the intersection of messages from various elements. This would include good service rendered to students, by staff of an institution which will portray a positive image of the institution, leading to student referral, institution recognition and the academic reputation of an institution and it location. According to Moogan (2010:571) today's student population is large and diverse and no longer consists of 18-21 year olds. As a result, the institution needs to be responsive and proactive in making the institution image and values known to prospective students (Anctil 2008).

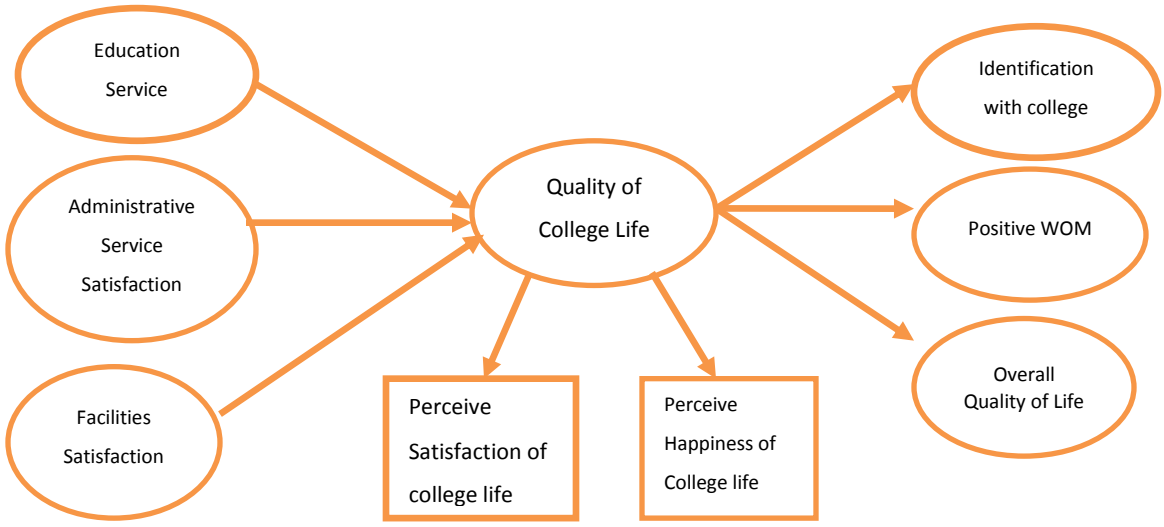
2.9. Quality of College Life

More than a third of South African students have neither a suitable nor a quiet place at home to study, and thus value the library facilities (de Jager and du Plooy 2006: 12). According to Tait and Jager (2009: 2029) all leaners entering tertiary education have expectations, with regard to learning exercise and individual preferences within the campus and it facilities. The campus life and facilities have a greater influence on

student perception, thus making an impact on overall academic performances (Edman and Brazil 2007: 372).

In understanding these factors it is possible to identify all key valuable, key factors contributing to Quality of College Life (QCL) (Figure: 2.3) for students. Yu and Lee (2008: 271), point out that this can be factored in by managers and administrators, to assist with allocation of resources for students, it would also enhance positive word-of-mouth promotion of an institution (Yu and Lee 2008: 271).

Figure 2.3: Quality of College Life Model



Source: *Yu and Lee: 2008*

Areas, such as administration services, educational services and facilities forms the basis of integrated student satisfaction within QCL.

A study conducted by (Markland 2006) in at 12 Further Education (FE) institution sector in the UK, reveals that far fewer studies have been carried out on the quality, of service provision at college libraries in the FE sector in the UK.

Markland (2006: 32) states that adequate funding and staffing are required, to ensure "the quality of library provision in any education sector". In addition, the vision and

strategy provided by the support of senior managers for library development, is seen as "an instrumental service in the delivery of the curriculum."

Furthermore, the need to enhance (ICT) is of importance to teachers, students and librarians. As a result senior College managers' perception towards the library, is influenced by the feeling that they are providing an effective and efficient library service when in fact, they are simply making an open space available that lends books and offers access to internet (Cilip 2003: 29).

The use of Electronic Information Services (EIS) is essential as students use this to gather information regarding the college work such as assignment projects and similar cases for teaching as it help them in preparation for teaching materials (Urghuhart et al, 2005).

2.9.1. Quality of teaching in FET

Quality of teaching serves as a parameter in educational institutions. It is also one of within the factors that student's consider before deciding to enrol in a higher institution as it refers to core service that institutions sell and offer to students. Wiesie, van Heerden and Jordaan (2010: 11) states that student expectations towards educational offerings, is based on the benefit the programme offering can provide them with regards to employment, status and lifestyle. The overall quality of teaching, however entails the curriculum, educational technologies methods, and staff qualifications (Wiese et al, 2010: 11).

In order to teach in South African public FET colleges teachers are required to have industrial knowledge and to be a specialist in the areas of the occupational field being taught. Currently, as stated in the May-July FET 2010 audit report while 54% of FET lecturing staff in 2002 had less than a degree/higher diploma, in 2010 the figures indicates that 57% of lecturing staff nationally have less than a degree/higher diploma. According to the NPFTED standard, half of the lecturing staff are deemed not qualified to teach (Cosser et al, 2010: 26).

An attempt to assist with this shortfall has been made by President Jacob Zuma who announced on the 4th April 2012 in a FET principal's meeting in Pretoria that 2, 5 billion will be allocated to this sector, as part of college refurbishment, building of new campuses and improving the training of lectures in the FET sector.

2.10. FET College: Implications

In spite of all evident and innovative changes, the FET sector is faced with a declining in student enrolments. According to Papier and Mcgrath (2008:6) and Cosser (2011: 71) FET Colleges have not succeeded in attracting learners, whereas Akoojee (2009b: 39) maintains that it is most unlikely that FET colleges will increase their student base to one-million, while this sector is facing decreasing numbers.

Although poor marketing of FET colleges and the incapacity to attract public support persist, FET remain the most logical means of addressing the demand for further learning (Cosser 2011: 71). According to Akoojee and Mcgrath (2008: 132), the role of staff as markets has been given little thought and there is no real sense of importance of linking marketing with quality assurance, curriculum development or staff development. Staffing and other additional staff such as marketers, are typically employed with due funding limitations.

The FET sector is being criticised for the poor marketing of the FET brand and failure to attract new student, when the opportunity to do so has been created, with the introduction of new programmes such as the (NCv), that requires the minimum of grade nine, 10, 11, or grade 12, for acceptance.

2.11. Conclusion

Chapter two discussed the nature and establishment, as well the merger, of SA public FET colleges, with a further detailed analysis of the enrolment in this sector. The importance of improving QCL in educational institutions were also discussed in this chapter.

In chapter three, a review of service marketing in an educational setting, with special reference to the marketing of public FET colleges using the 7Ps model, the importance of customer expectations and perceptions in a service context using the SERVQUAL gap model instruments, will be discussed.

Among other factors, which will be reviewed in the next chapter improvement of the quality of education, quality of service for an institution that seeks Excellence, and the recognition of being regarded as the institution of first choice are included.

CHAPTER THREE
MARKETING OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

3.1. Introduction

An overview of FET colleges, with the factors that constitutes the pillars of this sector were highlighted and discussed in Chapter two. The importance of service quality perspectives are discussed next. To deliver on the marketing function of organisations effectively, precisely and accurately, it is necessary to assess both the internal and external environment of an organisation.

This chapter also explains the Gaps Model, with special reference to gap five, which forms the basis of this study, with aim to investigate the student's expectations and perceptions towards SA-FET colleges. The application of the SERVQUAL instrument in an educational service context will be explored, starting with the exploration of the nature of marketing in the South African education system.

3.2. Educational Overview

The legislation that was introduced in 1990, by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), to implement the National Qualification Framework (NQF) requires educational institutions, such as FET and HEIs, to increase their market share (students) with efficient management and solid market practices (Wiese, van Heerden, Jordaam and North. 2009: 40). As a result of monetary subsidies assured by the DHET, higher education institution, including FET colleges, are to increase student enrolments to meet the target of one million registered students by 2015, with a further four million students enrolments projected by 2030.

Bonnema and Van Der - Waldt, (2008: 314) point out that changes in the educational landscape have an impact on public perception and the consumer behaviour of prospective students. As a result, these new institutions have to be re-branded, and

new programmes offered have to be marketed accordingly (Bonnema and Van Der Waldt, 2008: 315).

Given South African history marketing was viewed as a concept best suited for commercial organisations, driven by commercial imperative, to increase profitability, and expand the consumer market (Akoojee and Mcgrath 2008: 133). This however, was not applied in the case of educational institutions because until the late 1980s, tertiary institutions operated in a regulated and protected environment, with a steady income subsidy from government (Mzimela, 2002). Since then, marketing and marketing communication strategies have been subjected to change (Redmond, 2010: 24).

3.3. Service Marketing and Education

Russell (2005: 67) states that education can be classified as a marketable service like any other service. Many authors and academics researchers recognise that marketing in the education sector has played a pivotal role and is paramount to student recruitment (Ivy 2001, Maringe and Foskett 2002).

According to Ivy (2008: 289) if the institution qualification can satisfy the student's needs, tuition is provided according to student expectations, and data are available with which they can make informed decisions about qualification choices and pricing, those programme, which could be perceived as value courses, could be filled Ivy (2008: 289). To achieve this, an appropriate marketing mix can be developed which takes marketing activities in service institution into account.

The organisations' survival relies on the success of its marketing functions and marketing activities, and the quality of the product/services offered can satisfy the needs and wants of consumers (students). This notion has been applied by non-profit service organisation spurred on by seeing corporate benefit in for profit and increasing the consumer market share Akoojee and McGrath (2008: 133).

Educational institutions are becoming aggressive in their marketing activities according to Russell (2005: 67), who states that they need to, however be clear about their positioning and the image they intend to convey to the public. The institution image serves as an essential marketing tool to promote the institution, and influences students and learner perceptions towards the institution in their decision to registers (Russell 2005: 67).

3.4. Service

Service can be defined as plan, process and performance. According to Zeithmal and Bitner (1996) service includes all economic activities whose output is not a physical product or construction, is generally consumed at the same time as it is produced and provides value in the forms that are essentially intangible concerns of its purchase (Zeitmal and Bitner 1996).

Grönroos (2007: 52) defines service as a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but necessarily always take place in the interaction between the customer and the service employee. When FET colleges market their programmes to students, they do so based on a plan, the studies themselves are a process, lasting a number of years, and students assess the quality of service based on the performance of instructors, as well as other staff (Gudlaugsson 2010: 48).

3.4.1. Basic characteristics of services

Services differ from a physical product, and there are generally four characteristic of service which are defined by Zeithmal and Bitner (2003: 20) and Lamb, Hair, (2004: 439-440) namely: Intangibility, Inseparability, Perishability and Heterogeneity.

3.4.1.1. Intangibility:

Services are performances or actions rather than objects (Zeithmal and Binner 2003: 20). They cannot be seen, touched, felt and tasted in the same manner as tangible goods. According to Gudlaugsson (2010: 48) education is an intangible process which

cannot be stored in the stock-room, cannot be patented and shown, nor tested in advance. As a result services are not any particular kind of product.

3.4.1.2. Inseparability:

Services are produced and consumed simultaneously in service industries (Pérez, Abad, Carrillo and Fernández 2007: 163). This also means that, frequently the customer is present while the service in being produced and may even take part in the production process Zeithaml and Bitner 2003: 20). In the case of educational service, this is apparent in student registration for a course or programme at the FET, and attendance of lectures sessions. The interactive consumption and interactive process thus define service.

3.4.1.3. Perishability:

This refers to the fact that service cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned Zeithaml and Bitner (2003: 20). These characteristics makes it the service providers' mission to deliver precise and promised services, all the time and at the right time. In educational service, this is true to the extent in which a poor class session can be neither returned nor replaced, by a better one. Perishability enhances the importance of assessing supply and coordinating the demand (Gudlaugsson 2010: 48). Therefore, service that does not meet expectations cannot be returned.

3.4.1.4. Heterogeneity:

Since services are performances, frequently produced by humans, no two services will be precisely alike (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003: 20). In educational service, the staff members who provide service are often viewed and perceived as the service, by the students. As a result, the staff mood may vary from day to day, and staff performances may also fluctuate. The same can also be said about students, as their form as well their preparation, varies, which would make them respond differently to instructions (Gudlaugsson 2010: 48).

3.4.2. Service Quality and Assessment

A variety of approaches in defining service quality, are offered by Wilkinson, Redman, Snape and Marchington (1998: 18). Quality is the extent to which service provides process the satisfaction of the consumer, in so far as the FET can satisfy the expectations of the user (students). In service organisations this notion is paramount, as it recognises the customer's loyalty and satisfaction. Lovelock and Wright 2002: 14) define quality as the degree to which a service satisfies the customers by meeting, their needs, wants and expectations. This translates to the fact that unhappy and unsatisfied customers will decide to use other suppliers because expectations were not met which will lead to disappointment.

The importance of service quality, in the firm that aims to maintain, and sustain the loyalty of customers, requires adherence to the notion of service quality perception, which is a comparison of consumer expectations with actual performance (DeMoranville and Bienstock, 2003: 217).

3.5. Quality in Education

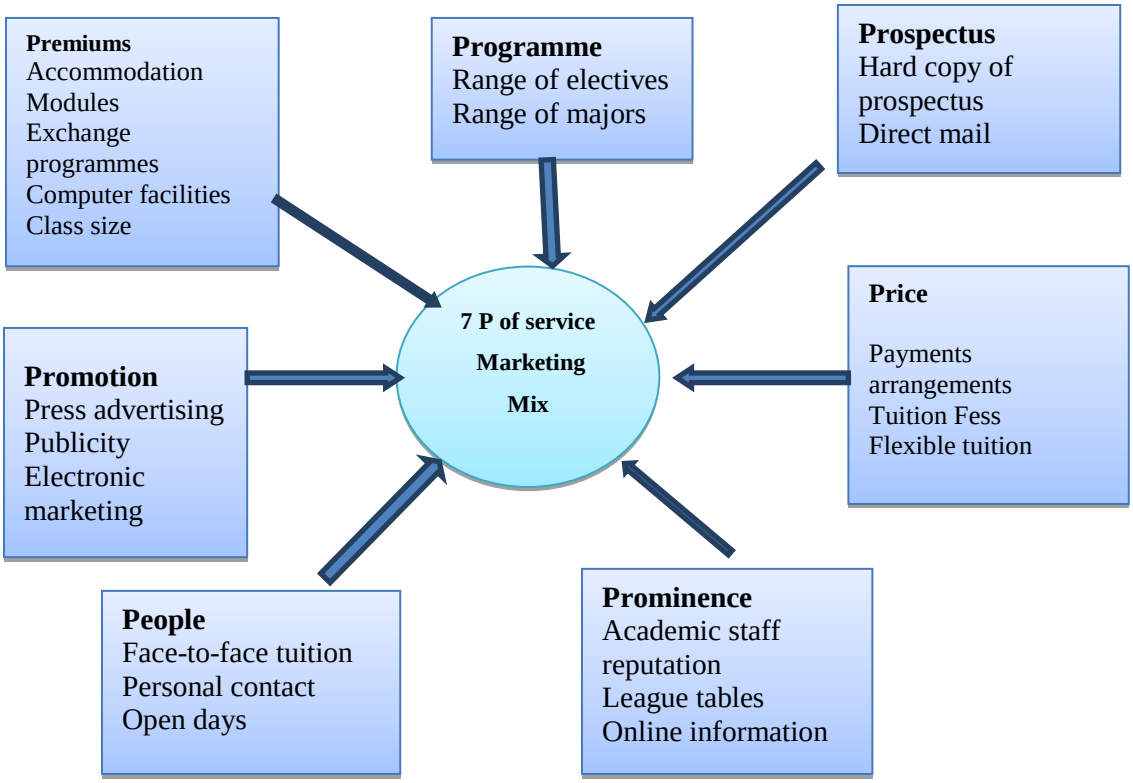
According to Heck (2000), higher education is facing pressure to improve value in its activities and presents the view for enhancing educational value to spend effort on continuous improvement, to focus on stakeholder's interest so as to increase student satisfaction. Student satisfaction is often used to determine educational quality, where the ability to address strategic needs is of prime importance (Cheng 1990). Tan and Sei (2004) state that quality in education can be determined, by the extent to which student needs and expectations can be satisfied.

3.6. Service Marketing Mix

Marketing mix has been defined as a set of controllable marketing tools that institutions use to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It further consist of everything that the education service sectors can use, in order to influence demand for the services it offers (Ivy, 2008: 289). Traditionally tangible products have used the 4Ps

model whereas the services sector adversely used the 7Ps, in order to satisfy the needs of service provider's customer (prospective students). Ivy (2008: 289) describes the extended 7Ps model in an educational setting.

Figure 3.1: The 7P's of Service Marketing Mix in Business School



Source: Adapted from Ivy (2008: 294).

The programme: refers to what is being sold and the complex benefits the customer desires in meeting an ultimate need. Bisardi and Ekwulugo (2003: 319) point out that the higher education offerings (product) are grouped into three categories, i.e. the core, tangible and augmented. The core benefit is that students are not buying certificate/diploma/degree, they are buying the benefit that the qualification obtained at HEIs (FETs) can provide, in terms of employment, status and lifestyle. Whereas the tangible category refers to the physical layout of the campus, the library and its facilities, laboratories and sporting facilities, the augmented category is made up of intangible attributes such as library membership for graduates, loans and employment services

(Bisardi and Ekwulugo, 2003: 319). If these factors are not achieved, students in FET will not be satisfied (Bisardi and Ekwulugo, 2003: 319)

The price: refers to the elements of the service marketing mix, and is dominated by what is charged for the certificate/diploma/degree or tuition fees that are required at HEIs as FET Colleges. Ivy (2008: 289) states that pricing elements have an impact on student perception of the quality, which also determined the institutions credibility and its reputation (Kinnel 1989: 16)

According to Bontrager (2004: 12) pricing in enrolment strategies revolve around three concepts, which are closely related. Price elasticity, refers to the cost of tuition and the willingness of students to pay net revenue and financial and leveraging (strategy that combines the concepts of price elasticity and net revenue to determine the appropriate amount of institutionally funded financial aid needed to enter specific students to enrol Bontrager (2004: 12)

The premium: refers to the distribution method the FET sector adopts, to provide the tuition to its market in a manner that meets, if not exceeds students' expectations (Ivy 2001: 290). Place is the major factor in developing a service marketing strategy. Due to the inseparability of service from the producer, it also enables the organisation to get the product to where and when the customer wants it (Baker 2003: 602)

The promotion: It encompasses all tools the service organisations can use to reach the targeted audiences. Promotion includes advertising, personal selling activities, promotions and all other forms of publicity. Due to the intangible nature of service, it is difficult to advertise service, as it not easily depicted in an advert (Clow, James, Kraneburg and Berry 2006: 404).

The people: are parts of the service marketing mix. Lovelock and Wirtz (2007: 25) encourage people planning within the marketing mix in order to develop the interaction between customers and employees. In the education service contexts this refers to the

administrative support and academics staff who interact with prospective students, which does have an impact on student perceptions of service quality (Ivy 2008: 290)

The physical evidence and process: are the newest additions to the services mix. Since services are intangible and cannot be defined in terms of physical attributes, their service evaluation takes place before an acquisition is made and based on intangible elements which help form a product (Zeithmal and Berry 2003: 25).

The processes: Services are unlike tangible product that a consumer purchases, takes ownership of, and takes home for consumption. Education services requires payment prior to 'consumption' and ownership does not takes place; it is a longer process and face-to-face interaction often results (Ivy 2008: 291).

Ivy goes on to state that the processes in education services is not straightforward, because from the time students register, there are other processes that takes places. These consist of registration for the appropriate course, inserting and calculating the correct marks against students records, and ultimately awarding of qualifications. Other processes such as finances, accommodation, time-tables and the library, are also required to ensure the highest level of student satisfaction (Ivy 2008: 291).

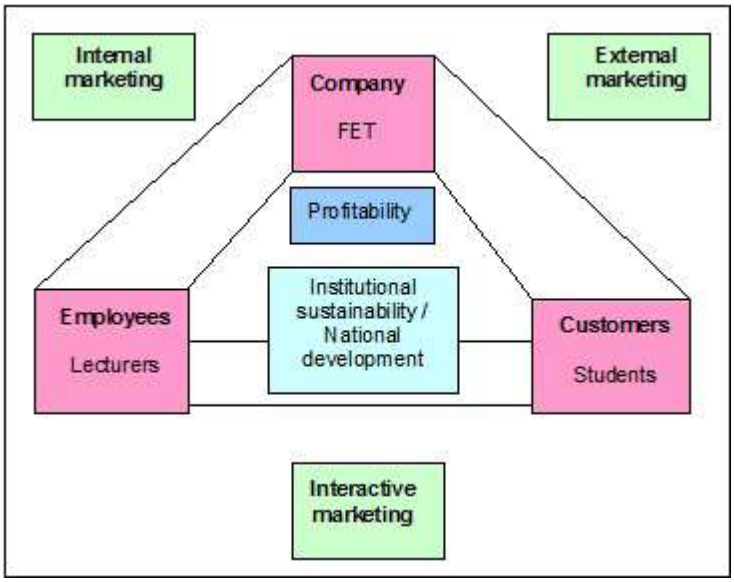
As service education institutions, both HE and FET Colleges are tasked to increase student numbers by the state who is an employer and the funding subsidiser. Akoojee and McGrath (2008:141) stated that marketing in education has been particularly active in the higher education sector, where competition is high. Universities and colleges are competing to increasing student numbers in order to meet projections set by the state**.** The emphasis now is to build the relationship between the organisation and customers, by adopting the 'know your customer' philosophy approach.

3.7. Marketing of Public FET College

For educational institutions, such as FET colleges who face the challenges of meeting student needs, all marketing activities must be geared towards customer needs

(students) (Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003: 318). To meet the desired target market in service institutions such as FET colleges, Akoojee and Mcgrath (200: 138) suggest a service marketing model which will allow an educational institute to situate their marketing practises as external, internal, or interactive. The service marketing triad as adapted and applied in the education environment (Figure: 2.5), shows that in this model the company becomes the institution (FET), and the customers become prospective students, while the employee who renders the service is presented as institutional personnel.

Figure 3.2: Service marketing triad as adapted and applied in education environment



Source: adapted Kotler (1994)

- **External Marketing (**relationship between the customer and company**)**

The primary objective in the context of external marketing practices (Figure 2.5), is directed as a brand awareness of the service in a particular target market (Akoojee and Mcgrath 2008: 139). Defining this target market and identifying strategies to reach this market, represent the core function of marketing units, which is assessed in terms of the

quantitative indicator of increased enrolments (Akoojee and Mcgrath 200: 139). External marketing in this perspective is understood in terms of student recruitment.

- **Internal Marketing (**relationship between the company and the employees**)**

Internal marketing points to internal processes, which leads to successful client transactions (Akoojee and Mcgrath 2008: 139). It ensures that attention is paid to the role that employees play in the organisation. This element emphasises on ensuring that employee satisfaction is achieved, inter alia, successful human resources practices, designed to maximise appropriate conditions under which work is undertaken, are likely to be the focus of attention in internal marketing. Further, satisfying the conditions for internal marketing is likely to result in increased employee motivation, offers the likelihood of retention, and ensures quality service delivery.

- **Interactive Marketing** (relationship between the customer and employees)

This element, interactive marketing, is describe in this model, as the relationship between the customer and employees in the organisation. Akoojee and Mcgrath (2008: 140) suggest that interactive marketing takes place primarily during the consumption process and is an important component of generating repeat sales. The active management of the buyer-seller relationship at every stage of the delivery (Akooje and McGrath 2008: 140) predicts this feature of the interactive nature of marketing.

3.8. Students as a Customer

Numerous researchers have argued whether students in an education context are customers. Bisardi and Ekwulugo (2003: 319) state that, in education service sector, it is being debated whether students are raw materials, graduates the products, and employers the customers (Kotler and Fox (1985). Some scholars and contemporary academics consider this idea as absurd and strongly agree that education is a unique experience that is different from the ideal customer experience (Ehigie and Taylor 2009: 503).

The idea of student as customers started in the mid-1980's, when the Total Quality Management (TQM) was introduced into the business world. As outlined by Ivy (2008: 289), the merit of the argument states that, employers seldom pay education institutions for their graduates. It is far more common to have students paying HE for the service received which is ultimately when students are awarded a certificate/diploma/degree. Based on this argument, students are customers and certificate/diploma/degrees are product as the designing of these certificates/diplomas/degrees are central elements of the marketing mix Ivy (2008: 289).

Yoe (2008: 269) offers two distinct views of student as customers; for instance, those who regard students as primary customers associate them as being involved in the input and output of the learning process. However, those who regard students' potential employers as primary customers, argue that it is important to consider the economic reality of the situation, where lesson content should be tailored to employer's needs. Students, in both contents, are regarded as internal customers.

Although education prepares students over a long-term for the future, students have no concept of what they need (Jaraiedin and Ritz, 1994: 33). It is in this long-term view that potential employers are regarded as primary customers, while students are regarded as secondary customers.

3.9. Expectations

Zeithmal, Bitner and Gremler (2006: 81) state that "customer expectations are a belief about the service delivery that function as standard or reference in which performance is judge. Thorough knowledge about customer expectation is a critical aspect in service marketing, because customers compare their perceptions of performance with such a reference point when evaluating service quality."

In general, expectations are what customers ideally want, for example what customers wish for, what they expect from an excellent service provider, what the customer hopes for and what they think should happen in the next encounter (Lotz 2009: 27).

3.9.1. Customer expectations of service

Customers have different types of expectations about service (Harris 2003: 17; and Metters, King-Metters, Pullman and Walton 2006: 83). A customer's expectation changes constantly and each customer will have a unique set of expectations. This set of unique customer expectations embraces the customer service provider to constantly strive and meet these expectations. For instance, if a customer's last experience with the company was dissatisfactory and negative, the customer will not again approach the company due to doubt and negative disservice.

Research has proven two types of customer expectations in service marketing. According to the level of service expectations, the highest one is referred to as desire service, which deals and reflects hopes and consumer wishes. The other level of service expectations is defined as adequate service, which represents the minimum, tolerable customer expectations, which is the bottom level of performance consumers are willing to accept (Metters at el, 2006: 83).

3.9.2. The zone of tolerance

Zeitmal and Bitner (2003: 64) maintain that factors that influence desired and predictive service expectation (Figure 2.6), can expand and contact within a customer. The zone of tolerance represents the difference between the desired service and the level of service considered as adequate.

Desired service is more stable than adequate service. Fluctuations in the zone of tolerance are mostly focused on the adequate service level rather than on the desired level (Gilbert and Wong 2003: 522). An individual customer's zone of tolerance increases or decreases based on a number of factors, including that of company controlled factors.

The customer zone of tolerance also varies for different services, attributes, or dimensions.

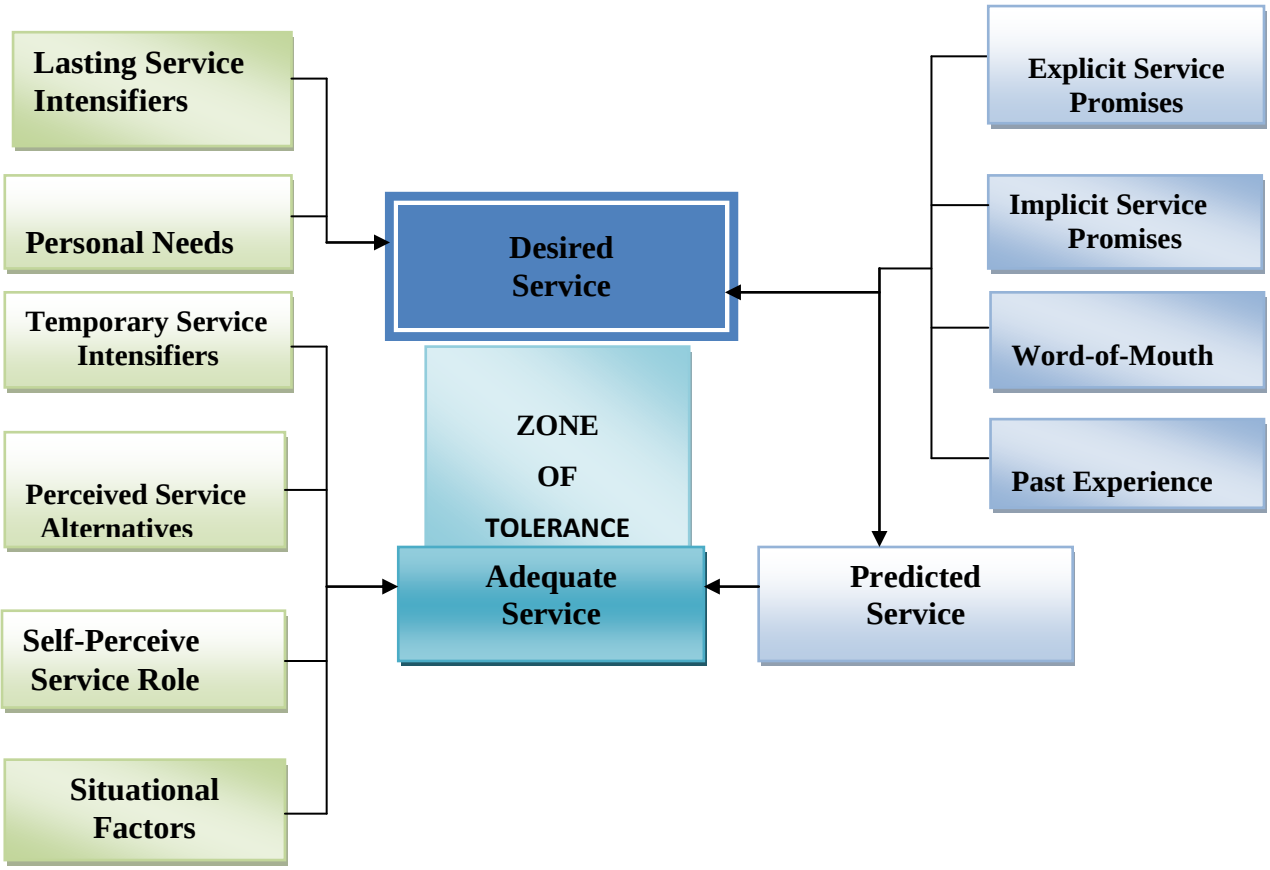
3.9.3. Factors that influence customer expectations

In essence, there are many uncontrollable factors that influence customer expectations; it is imperative that marketers should try and understand these customer expectations as they play a critical role in marketing. These factors are generally divided into three levels of customer service expectations, namely desired service expectations, adequate service expectations and both desired and predictive service expectations.

3.9.3.1. Factors influencing desired service expectations

Figure 3.3 illustrates the factors that influence the desired and predictive service expectations.

Figure 3.3: Factors that influence desired and predictive service expectation



Source: Zeithmal, Bitner and Gremler (2006: 93)

Personal needs and lasting service intensifiers are the two largest influences on desired service levels and elevate the level of desired service. Personal needs refer to those states or conditions that are essential to the physical or psychological well-being of the customer are imperative factors that shape what the customer desire in service. Personal needs can fall into many categories, including physical, social, psychological and functional (Zeithaml and Bitner 2003: 67)

Metters et al, (2006: 88) indicate that lasting service intensifiers are individual, stable factors that drives customers to heightened sensitivity to service. Desired service expectations and personal service philosophy are the two most important factors of the lasting service intensifiers. Desired service will occur when customer expectations are driven by another person or group of people. Personal service philosophy means that customers have their own cultural character when making a decision (Gilbert and Wong 2003: 520)

3.9.3.2. Factors influencing adequate service expectations

Figure 3.3 shows that there five important factors that influence adequate service (Zeitaml at el, 2006: 90). These factors are presented below.

- Temporary service intensifiers include short-term and individual factors that make a customer more aware of the need for service;
- Perceived service alternative means that other competitors, who obtain the same service, can influence the customers' choice and decisions;
- The customers self-perceived service role is the third factor affecting the level of adequate service. Since customers' expectations are partly shaped by how well they believe they are performing their own role in service delivery, the role the customer is to state the level of service expected;
- Situational factors indicate that customers perceive but that it is beyond the control of service providers; and
- Predicted service is an estimate of the service that a customer will receive in an individual transaction with a service provider. Since customers are always likely to

predict what will happen in the next service encounter or transaction in terms of their experience, predicted service is viewed in this model as an influencer of adequate service.

In general, these factors are short-term and tend to fluctuate more than the factors can influence desired service.

3.9.3.3. Factors influence both desired and adequate expectations

There are one internal and three external factors that influence both desired service expectations and predicted service expectations (Figure 2.6): (1) explicit service promises, (2) implicit service promises, (3) word-of-mouth communications, and (4) past experience (Kurtz and Clow 2007: 91 and Robledo 2001: 25).

Explicit service promises that the organisation conveys various statements about the service to its customers. Lovelock and Wright (2007: 194-195) point out that explicit service promises personal and non-personal statements about the service, made by the organisation to its customers.

- Personal service promises statements, and are communicated by salespeople and employee, whereas;
- Non-personal service promises statements, which are made in advertising, brochures and other written publications.

All types of explicit service promises influences the levels of both desired and predicted services. They shape what customers desires in general as well as what they predict will happen in the next service encounter, from a particular service encounter.

Implicit service promises are service-related cues to customers, by means of price and tangibles associated with the service. In general, the higher the price, the more impressive the tangibles, the more the customer will expect the service (Rosene, 2003: 54).

Word-of-mouth belongs to a type of informal recommendation, which is one of the most influential sources of expectation Robledo, (2007: 29). According to Kurtz and Clow (2007: 93), word-of-mouth is the strongest source of information used by consumers in forming expectations. As a result, customers will seek the opinion of others before purchasing a service. Word-of-mouth can come from three sources: personal, expert and derived sources.

Past experience, is the customers' previous exposure relevant to the focal service, which is another force in shaping predictions and desires (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003: 73). It can efficiently and effectively adjust service expectations and decrease dissatisfaction for customers.

3.10. Perceptions

Quintana (2006) suggests that when it comes to the customer, it is their perceptions of the quality of service on offer that determines its success. The final measure of quality in customer service is simply how the consumer perceives it. Perceptions are considered relative to expectations. Customers perceive service in terms of the quality of the service they receive, and whether they are satisfied with experiences or not.

Perceptions become an influencing factor, when comparing customer satisfaction with the service provided. In the context of this study, a possible example could be students at FET colleges developing a negative perception of the service quality, when the services that are rendered by the institution fall below their expectation, creating dissatisfaction.

3.10.1. Customer Perceptions of Service

Zeithmal and Bitner (2000: 27) describe customer expectations as "the subjective assessment of actual service" This refers to how consumers perceive service; how they assess the quality of received service; whether they were satisfied; and whether they receive good value. Therefore, customer perception of service, is also defined as a customer perceptions of quality, satisfaction, and value.

The levels of customer expectations play an important role in the perceived service quality environment. Mcdaniel, Lamb and Hair (2008: 172) state that two people can share the same experience and describe it differently. Furthermore, customers bring their previous experience and overall perceptions of an organisation to each encounter.

3.11. The SERVQUAL Gap Model

The SERVQUAL model allows for measuring the 'Gap' between the expectations and perception of service quality in service organisations (Peruraman, Zeithmal and Berry, 1985: 44). The service gap model originally indicated five gaps in service delivery, which influence consumers judgements about service quality received (Soutar and Mcneil 1996: 73 and Shahin 2003).

After an exploratory study by Parasuman et al. (1988) in an attempt to investigate how consumers evaluate service quality, the results show that, regardless of service consumers use the same criteria when evaluating service quality. Lovelock and Wirtz (2004: 424) argues that, if management accepts the view that quality entails consistently meeting the customers' expectations, it is the responsibility of management to balance the customer expectations and perceptions by narrowing or closing the gaps between the two. Males and females may, for instance, have different assessments or perceptions of certain events; this difference is due to cognitive categories.

According to Metters et al. (2006: 187), the data obtained through the SERVQUAL instrument can be used to compute service quality gap scores of different levels' dimensions. Furthermore, by examining each of the gap scores, an organisation can assess its overall quality of service as perceived by customers, as well as identify the key dimensions, and facets within those dimensions on which it should focus its quality improvement efforts Zeithmal et al. (1990: 173).

Skalen and Fourgere, (2007: 110) maintain that, the gap model conceptualises service quality, as a comparison between customer expectations and perception - the

‘disconfirmation paradigm’ for measurement, which is the predominant model in the field of quality and customer satisfaction literature.

The SEVQUAL model (Figure 2.7) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) demonstrates how service quality emerges between the customer and the service provider. The upper part of the model addresses the phenomena of the consumer, while the lower part encompasses the phenomena related to the service provider.

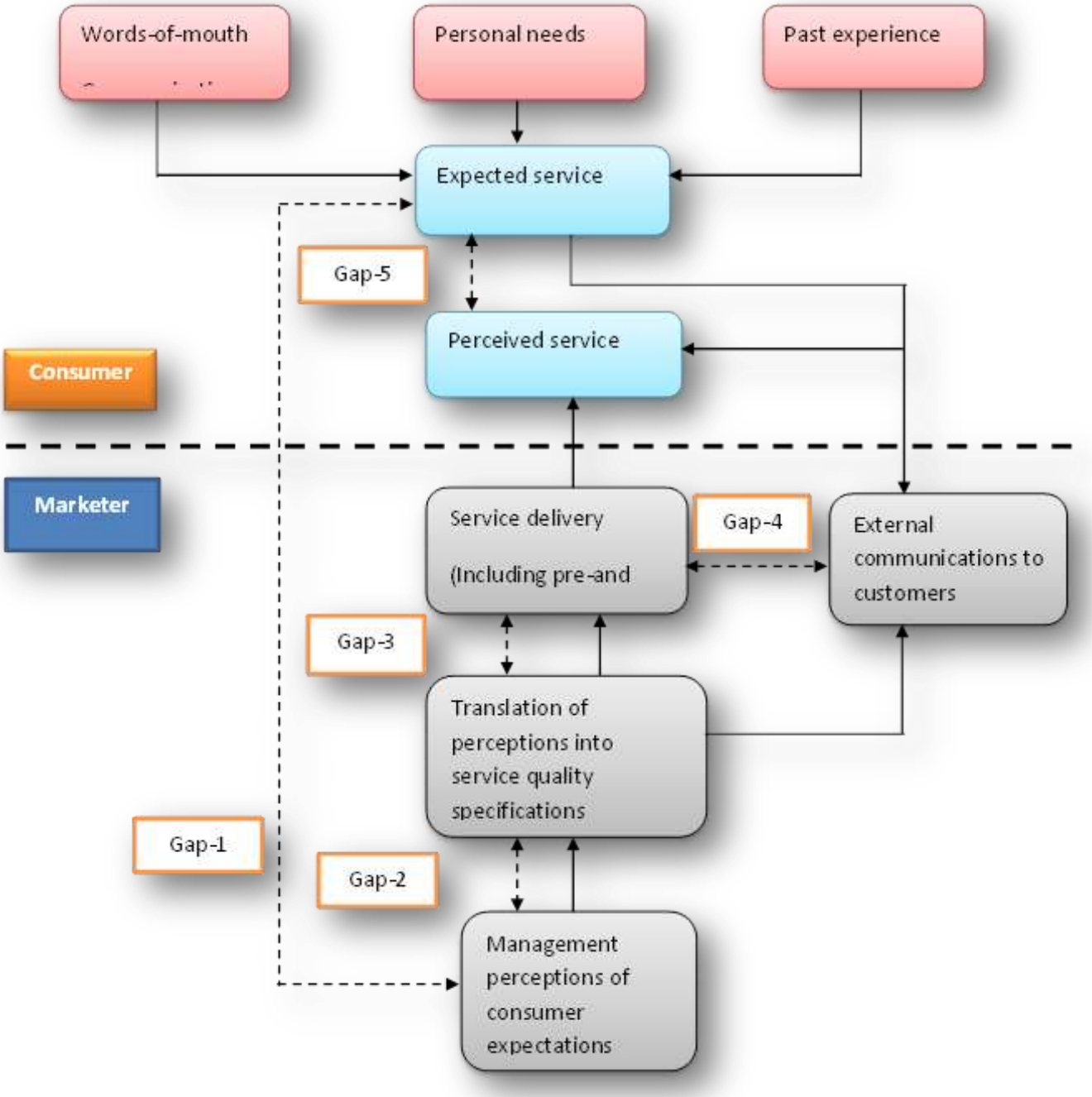
- ‘Expected service’ is a function of the customers’ ‘past experience, ‘personal needs’ and ‘word-of-mouth communications’. It is also influenced by market communication activities of an organisation;
- The service experienced in this model is called ‘perceived service’, which serves as the outcome of a series of internal decisions and activities;
- Management perception of customer specification guides decisions about quality specifications to be followed by the organisation when service delivery (execution process) takes place.

The basic structure demonstrates the steps to be considered when analysing and planning service delivery (Shanin 2006).

The Gap Model constitutes five possible contributing factors for companies’ weaknesses or gaps. The quality gaps are as a result of the inconsistencies in the quality management process of the company (Grönroos 2000: 10). Gaps 1-4 indicate and represent the shortfall within the service provider company, Gaps 1 and 2 are management oriented, while Gaps 3 and 4 are service specific.

This research will highlight Gap 5, the gap between perceived service and expected service at FET service institutions in KZN. This gap is highlighted as the most important service quality gap, which form the basis of this study objective. Gap 5, the customer gap, identified as the difference between customer expectations and expectations, is the main focus. It is imperative that the organisation closes this gap, in order to satisfy their customers and facilitate the building of long-term relationships (Parasuraman et al, 1989: 13).

Figure 3.4: The Gap model of service quality



Source: McDaniel, Lamb and Hair 2008: 337

3.11.1. Gap 1:- Customer expectation and Management of perception

There is a difference between customer expectations and management perceptions of service (Figure 2.7), and the understanding of those expectations (Kotler and keller 2006: 413). This difference/gap is the largest and occurs when management does not interact directly with customers or are unwilling to find out about their expectations. Hoffman and Bateson (2002: 302) identify some of the mistakes that tend to occur when such knowledge discrepancies or gaps exist, as follows:

- Wrong employee may be hired;
- Incorrect employee training procedure may be provided;
- The wrong facilities may be provided to customers, while the service that they may require, is not provided;
- The number of management levels that exist within the organisation also affect the gap; and
- Too many layers of management inhibit communication because they provide barriers between customers and management.

For example, management at FET colleges may not understand, what their students' expectations are because they do not interact directly with students, and do not take note of suggestions from staff that do interact with customers and have an understanding of students' expectations.

Zeithaml, Bitner and Greamler (2006: 35) show the factors responsible for Gap 1, as Lack of upward communication, Inadequate marketing research orientation, Lack of relationship focus and Inadequate service recovery (Zeithmal and Bitner, 2006: 102 and Bruhn and George 2006: 102).

3.11.2. Gap 2: Management perception and service quality specification

According to Kotler and Keller (2006: 412) Gap 2 exists between management perception and service quality specification. Management might correctly perceive wants, yet problems arise when they find it difficult to match or exceed such expectations. This is compounded by the inability, on the part of management, to

translate customer expectations into service delivery specifications (Zeithmal et al. 2006: 36).

There are various factors that influence this gap. Metters et al. (2006: 186) summarise these factors in Gap 2 as, the service provider firstly, not having a formal quality programme to define quality of service. Secondly, management may focus more on cost reduction and short-term profit, than on customer requirements. Thirdly, the physical evidence and service scope of critical factors affecting customers' perceptions of service quality can meet neither customer nor employee needs.

3.11.3. Gap 3: Service quality specification and service delivery

According to Bruhn and George (2006: 226) service delivery refers to the process of transferring available service products for consumption or use. A service delivery Gap will occur when employees cannot correctly translate service standards into actions (Rosene 2003: 52). Silvestro (2005: 210) indicates that Gap 3 is the difference between the actual service quality and the service standard by service providers.

Human resources are one of the crucial factors that support the appropriate service standard. For example, lack of teamwork, poor employee job fit, a poor supervisory system, role ambiguity, and role conflict, are all negative factors. The customer is the second vital factor influencing this Gap. Customers play an important role and impact each other in the entire service delivery process. Intermediaries find it difficult to offer the same quality, even if they have the same service standard. The fourth possible, is that service firms cannot present enough resources and capacity when a firm faces situations of over-demand (Metters et al. 2006: 187). Furthermore, Grönroos (2001: 103) indicates that the inadequacy of either tools or technology will widen this gap.

3.11.4. Gap 4: Service delivery and external communication

Lovelock and Wirtz (2004: 364) define Gap 4 (Figure 2.7) as the difference between service delivery and service providers' extended communication. This gap occurs when the service providers external communication does not match actual service delivery.

Zeithmal et al. (2006: 43) propose four main reasons for this gap. First, internal and external communications are not effectively integrated in the service delivery by the service provider. Secondly, customer expectations are not effectively employed and managed by management. Thirdly, the service provider often over promotes to maintain competitive advantage during the company's extended communication process. Fourth, horizontal communication between those responsible for the company's external communication and the front office, is ineffective.

3.11.5. Gap 5: Expected service and perceive service

The customer Gap, between customer perceptions and expectations, is an external gap (Figure 2.7). To be able to deliver excellent service and close the customer gap, it is necessary to close four internal gaps which are between service providers and their customers (Silvestro 2005: 217- 218).

Figure 2.7 also shows that both Gaps 3 and 4 have a direct impact on customer's quality perceptions. Today, more service organisations and researchers mainly focus on the service delivery and market communication gaps, than the other two gaps (Zeithmal et al 2006: 43). This tendency implies that managers in the FET sector in South Africa should concentrate on how to be effective and improve their service delivery process and external communications.

3.12. Measuring the service quality dimension

An on-going debate on how to measure service has been key priority in service literature over past decades. Numerous researchers have attempted to create models with which to measure the service quality for service organisations' survival and success. The most popular and influential measure of service quality is the SERVQUAL (SERVices QUALity) measure, a model developed by (Parasuraman et al. 1985 and refined in 1988, 1991, and 1994) ; (DeMoranville and Biestock, 2003: 220). The SERVQUAL instrument is used to obtain respondents' opinion about their expectations and perceptions of organisational performances, along with five quality dimensions.

Originally, the 10 determinants of service quality consisted of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, and security as well as understanding/knowing the customer. Nowacki (2005: 236) points out that in 1984, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry established these 10 service quality dimensions, which customers use to judge the quality of service offered.

Zeithmal and Bitner (2003: 134) suggest that customers do not perceive quality in a one-dimensional way, but rather judge quality on multiple factors relevant to context. It is furthermore, the organisations responsibility to ensure that either satisfactory quality or ideal quality is attained, each time the organisation provides a service. Organisations can achieve this by delivering quality service, and through identifying and understanding which dimensions of quality are important to customers' expectations.

The 10 dimensions are not necessarily independent of each other; there could be some overlap between categories. As a result of further study by Parasuraman et al., Groonross, (2000: 74) combined the 10 original determinants into five dimensions, made up of tangibles, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance (including competence, credibility, security courtesy) and empathy (access, communication, and understanding/knowing the customer), which encompass the service quality dimension (Figure 3.5).

The scale of Zeithmal, Parasuraman and Malholtra (2002: 364-365) involves expectation-perceptions gap scores, along with five dimensions

Figure 3.5: Service quality dimension

Original Ten Dimensions for Evaluating Service Quality	**SERVQUAL Dimensions**				
	Tangibles	**Reliability**	**Responsiveness**	**Assurance**	**Empathy**
Tangibles					
Reliability					
Responsiveness					
Competence					
Courtesy					
Credibility					
Security					
Access					
Communication					
Understanding/ Knowing the customer					

Source: Gronroos (2000: 74)

3.12.1. Dimension of service quality

- **Tangibles** (physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel**)**
- **Reliability (**ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately**)**
- **Responsiveness** (willingness to help and prompt service)
- **Assurance** (knowledge and courtesy of employees and the ability to inspire confidence)
- **Empathy** (caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers)

3.12.1.1. Tangibles – Visual Perception

Zeithmal and Bitner (2003: 98) define tangibles as the material appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Tangibles provide physical representation of the service that customers use to evaluate quality. In most cases, first impression is the last impression. Employees' appearance at FET colleges should be neat and appealing. FET service centres, ranging from campus life,

classroom, library, and offices should have modern looking equipment as well as technology that process and keep records, receipts, and results of students' efficiency.

3.12.1.2. Reliability – Delivering on Promises.

Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006: 129) describe reliability as the ability to perform the promised service both dependently and accurately. Reliability has been perceived to be the most reliable and important of the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Customers expect service to be delivered and accomplished timeously and without any delay or errors.

In case of FET's credibility, reliability will consist of customers (students) receiving expected services at all FET colleges, at the time promised to them, with a sincere interest in solving customers' problems as these arises. This could take place either student receipts, students results and academic. All service institutions need to be aware of customer expectations of reliability, as sometimes there is the propensity to overstate promises.

3.12.1.3. Responsiveness – Willingness to Help.

According to Kang (2002: 285) responsiveness is the organisation's commitment and willingness to provide its service, in a timeous manner on a continuous basis. This dimension underlines the attentiveness and promptness required in dealing with customer (student) requests, complaints, and problems.

In the case of FET, students will be more than delighted to see resolution taken speedily by FET staff or an employee. The effort of staff member to going out of their way to assist and attend to a student query or enquiry; will be seen as sincere desire and willingness from a student's perspective.

3.12.1.4. Assurance – Inspiring Trust and Confidence.

Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi, and Katircioglu, (2005: 45) identify assurance as an employee's knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence, in the customer, in

addition to it being a critical aspect of importance for services, in which customers face a high level of risks or feel uncertain about their ability to evaluate service.

In addition, assurance is also understood to require the competence to perform the service politeness, and respect, for the customer, effective communication with the customer and, the general attitude that the service has the best interest at heart of the customer (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2006: 129). Trust and confidence build a long lasting relationship between the customer and the organisation and company representative. In the case of FET, the trust and confidence dimension can be achieved during recruitment, selection and registration, and trusting lectures. With these, student relations will be instilled.

3.12.1.5. Empathy- Treating Customers as Individuals.

Empathy is the ability to experience another's feeling as one's own and includes features such as approachability, sensitivity and the effort to understand another's needs (Zeithmal and Bitner 2003: 193). The provision of this dimension, includes access at any time, honest communication and understanding of consumers' problems.

Using the SERVQUAL Gap model will certainly assist FET management to identify the organisation's service strengths and weaknesses (gaps). The Gap model as discussed by Grönroos (2000: 100), is intended to be used for analysing sources of quality problems and helping managers understand how service quality can be improved. Similary, Skalen and Fougire (2007: 118) maintain that this should not be used as a once off event, but it should be used on a number of occasions in order to assure consumers that promises are adhered to.

3.13. Application of SERVQUAL instruments

In applying the SERVQUAL instruments, two statements for each of the 22 pairs of likert-type, parallel related items that represents the expectations (E) and perceptions (P) are included.

- **Expectations**: this section contains 22 sets of statements to ascertain general expectations of customers concerning service; and
- **Perceptions**: another set of 22 statements are included in this section, with which to measure customers' assessments of the actual service provided (Grönross, 2000: 76).

The service quality is calculated as the difference between expectations and perceptions, with important weights attributed to different measures: of the 22 statements in generic dimensions, with five to measure reliability, four to measure responsiveness, four to measure assurance, five to measure empathy and four to measure tangibles.

In making these measurements, respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreements on a five point likert scale, where 1 equals Strongly Disagree (SD) and 5 - Strongly Agree (SA). For each item, a gap score 'G' is then calculated as the different between the raw "Perception-of-performance" score (P) and the raw 'Expectation' (E) score. The gap score is calculated as

G=P-E

The largest negative gaps, combined with as assessment of where expectations are highest, facilitate prioritisation of performance improvement. On the converse, if gap scores in some aspect of service are positive, it implies that expectations are actually exceeded. The possible gap allows managers to review where they may be oversupplying on this particular feature of service, and whether there should be a redeployment of resources into the feature that is underperforming (Shanin 2006: 121).

3.14. Use of SERVQUAL in Education Institutions

There is extensive literature by various researchers who conduct studies using SERVQUAL instrument. Zafropoulous and Vrand (2007: 36-37) propose SERVQUAL as an appropriate instrument for service quality measurement in the context of education

and higher institutions, for various reasons. Ruby (1998: 339) demonstrates on how SERVQUAL can be used to study student satisfaction, (Slade 2001: 1) uses SERVQUAL to capture students perceptions of service quality before they complete their studies, O'Ne'll (2003: 310) presents a longitudinal study to understand students perceptions of time, and, Chua (2004: 1) to assess attitude at University with parents, faculty members and employees, while Sherry (2004: 2) assesses international students' perceptions. (Shanin 2003: 1) verifies this by stating that the adaptability of using the SERVQUAL model in the service industry, SERVQUAL has a scientific basis.

3.15. Criticism of SERVQUAL

Bardi, Abdulla, and Al-Modoni (2004: 820) note that since its development, the SERVQUAL instrument has received a lot of criticism. Although the model has been broadly criticised, the impact of SERVQUAL in the domain of service quality is widely accepted, and while a few of the claims remain undisputed, its major critics note its popularity (Coulthard 2004: 491). In spite of the inadequacies, researchers acknowledge the usefulness of SERVQUAL. However, further research is needed to adapt new positions and strategies.

3.16. Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus has mainly been on exploring the marketing of service, with a view to assess active marketing communication strategies used at HE, in addition to special attention being paid to the FET sector. The chapter explored and discussed the SERVQUAL model and its five respective, generic gap dimensions, with special reference to gap 5, which measures customer (students) expectations and perceptions of service. The next chapter will explain the methodology used in this empirical study.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1. Introduction

In Chapter three, an overview of the importance of service, with special reference to FET services institutions was discussed, in addition to the marketing of education, using 7Ps services marketing literature, with service quality dimensions, using the SERVQUAL gap model. The information gained was used to obtain a more precise insight in answer to the research questions, namely, what are student's expectations of the FET sector?, what are student's perceptions towards FET; what factors encourage enrolments in FET, as well how demographics differ according to student expectations and perceptions, in KZN FET colleges.

To put empirical findings into perspective, it is important to understand the research methodology followed**.** This chapter therefore provides the rationale for the research type, population, sampling method, questionnaire instruments, data collection, data analysis reliability and validity of this research.

4.2. Research Type

The study was descriptive, quantitative and cross- sectional in nature and aimed to provide a holistic perspective of the expectations and perceptions of students registered in all nine FET colleges in KZN. According to Grȍnroos (2007: 78), to establish how consumers perceive the quality of a given service, as discussed in the literature, both expectations and perceptions, regarding this particular service, should be measured.

4.2.1. Descriptive

According to House (2008: 192) descriptive research tries to determine what, who, why or where and its goal is to explain phenomena (Welman Kruger and Mitchel 2009: 23) This study aims to explore, investigate and explain the gaps between the expectations and perceptions of FET college students in KZN, with respect to college of choice.

4.2.2. Cross-sectional

A cross-sectional study takes place at a single-point in time (Fink and Kosecoff 2006: 61). Surveys of this nature are regarded as snapshots of a group of people or organisations. Dabholkar, Shephered and Thorne (2000: 148), state that the majority of empirical studies conducted to measure service quality, have been cross-sectional, where both expectations and perceptions were measured after the service has been delivered. Therefore, this study consisted of a cross-sectional survey, as it was done once, and will give the perspective of findings at one point in time.

4.2.3. Quantitative research

According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005: 124), quantitative research is generally concerned with counting and measuring. Quantitative research measures the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion or attitude.

4.3. Target Population

Target population refers to the population of interest, the group of people, events or topic of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate (Groebner, Shannon, Fry and Smith, 2005: 13). The selected sample is a subset of the target population. The population, in general, is the larger group of all events of interest, whether made up of people or occurrences, from which a sample is selected. For the purpose of this research, the target population is 220 000 students over 18 years, registered at FET colleges in South Africa (RSA-DHET 2010).

4.4. Sampling

The sample is the small number of events (people, occurrences etc.) drawn from the target population and used in a specific study, as if the sample adequately represents the general population of interest (Jones 2008:49).

4.4.1. Sampling Technique

The sampling technique is the process of selecting representative, subset observations from a population to determine the characteristics of the variable under study (Wegner 2002: 170). There are various methods of sampling that can be used to select a sample. Jankowicz (2005: 202-203) refers to two major categories of sampling, namely probability and non-probability. Probability is the most commonly used technique when a survey needs to make inferences from the population. With non-probability sampling, on other hand, it is impossible to reflect on the total population in terms of the researcher's subjective judgement. For the purpose of this study, non-probability sampling was used because the researcher had no guarantee that each element of the population could be identified in the sample. According to Welman et al. (2009: 68), non-probability sampling is the better choice in terms of time and financial expenses.

This study applied three types of sampling methods:

This study was based in the KZN province because this province has the second largest population in South Africa, and it also has a large number of FET colleges, therefore all FET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) were included in the study, i.e. a census.

Quota sampling is where the researcher selects a sample that would be representative of the relevant population. According to Maylor and Blackman (2005: 197) quota sampling is used in order to improve representativeness. This method was used to select the number of respondents per college/campus. The quota sampling consists of 200 NCv respondents doing, Level 2-L4 as well as 200 NATED respondents registered for -N3-N6 programmes at FET colleges (Table 4.4).

Through convenience sampling method, members/respondents are selected on the basis of being accessible and available. This method was used to select actual students according to the quotas, to complete the questionnaires.

- **Challenges experienced during data collection**

FET colleges offer trimester, semester and annual programmes. As a result, when the Ethical Research Committee issued the clearance letter, to be issued to college principals as per their request (college principal/HoD/senior lectures), it was in May 2012. During that time of the semester NATED students were already preparing for their semester examinations for May and June, while trimester NATED students were fully engaged with their April trimester registrations. Annual (NCv) students were available on campus, but they were also busy preparing for their ISAT examinations in June. Eventually, both semester and annual students went on June/July vacation, to return once colleges re-opened in August, when the trimester students were writing examinations. Furthermore, the permission from the DoE to conduct these interviews was set to expire in September 2012. In addition to this, the KZN-Provincial-Taxi strike had a negative impact on both the students and researcher as in some cases students were not on campuses or had to departure early from the campuses.

4.1.1 Sample size

Struwing and Stead (2004: 125), state that it is not possible to identify whether a sample is good or bad, and the researcher must consider the goal and the purpose of the study. According to Sekaran (2003: 294-295), sample sizes, which are larger than 30 and less than 500, are considered most appropriate for research studies. Sekaran and Bougie (2009: 296) indicate that, for a population of 220-000 a sample of 368 is suggested. According to Welman et al. (2009: 74), no matter how hard the researcher tries, it is impossible to select the perfect sample. To cater for incomplete or unusable questionnaires (non-response), 400 FET students were approached. Out of all nine FET colleges, there were only 301 questionnaires completed and returned from six of the FET colleges in KZN.

4.4.2. Non-responses

According to Welman et al. (2009: 73), non-response is likely to occur in questionnaires during the data collection stage. To minimise the bias, consequently the non-responses questionnaire cannot be representative of the total population. Welman et al. (2009: 73) point out four inter-related problems due to non-response:

- refusal to respond;
- ineligibility to respond;
- inability to locate respondent; and
- respondent located but unable to make contact.

As per quota sampling (Table 4.4) the researcher approached 400 students from all of the KZN-FET colleges, with only 316 questionnaires being completed and returned from six FET colleges. During data capturing, 15 questionnaires were identified as incomplete and they were excluded from the sample; therefore 301 questionnaires were used for this survey.

4.4.3. Sampling Units

The study was conducted at all nine FET Colleges in KZN, namely, Coastal, Elangeni, Esayidi, Majuba, Mnambithi, Mthashana, Thekwini, Umgungudlovu, and Umfolozi. This was necessary to be able to complete the study within the limitations of time and budget. Therefore, the reasons for choosing these nine FET campuses were; these colleges are located both in urban and rural areas; they offer a variety of types of respondents; the campuses chosen offer both new and old curricula; and each campus differs in terms of delivery sites or campuses (some have larger numbers of campuses and some have less). The bigger the number of campuses, the bigger the sample and a quota was set for each college (Table 4.1) resulting in a sample size of 400, allowing an excess for unusable questionnaires.

Table 4.1: Quota intended and obtained sample

No	9 FET Colleges	Intended and plan sample per FET	Intended Quota for: NCv L2-L4	Intended Quota for : Nated N4-N6	FET Total sample obtained
1	*College A*	40	20	20	50
2	*College B*	50	25	25	50
3	*College C*	52	26	26	55
4	*College D*	52	26	26	52
5	*College E*	46	23	23	46
6	*College F*	40	20	20	48
7	*College G*	40	20	20	Non-response
8	*College H*	40	20	20	Non-response
9	*College I*	40	20	20	Non-response
Total	6 Colleges participated	400	200	200	301

- New Curricula: refers to National Certificate (Vocational) - NC (v) Level 2 – Level 4.
- Old Curricula: refers to National Technical Education - (Nated) N4 – N6.

The sample was split into those studying the old curriculum versus the new curriculum, as there may be different perceptions and expectations by these students.

4.5. Questionnaire Design

The study objectives of this survey were:

- To identify expectations of students towards FET;
- To identify perceptions of students towards FET;
- To identify factors influencing enrolments in FET; and
- To identify demographic differences according to expectations and perceptions of FET.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives of the study, the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman et al (1985) was applied. Aimed at measuring customer expectation, perceptions and service quality the SERVQUAL instrument consists of 22 statements, with which to measure both expectations and perceptions across five generic dimensions, with a five pair likert-scale ranging from 1 - Strongly Disagree (SD) to 5 - Strongly Agree (SA). (**Appendix D)**

The five dimensions and their respective statements in the questionnaire are as follows:

Dimension	**Statement pertaining to the dimension**
• Tangibles	Statement 1-4
• Reliability	Statement 5-9
• Responsiveness	Statement 10-13
• Assurance	Statement 14-17
• Empathy	Statement 18-22

The questionnaires was in the form of closed-ended questions and respondents were asks to make their choices from a list of possible responses. Closed-ended questions include all possible answers and respondents make choices from among them (Armsrong and Kotler 2006: 111). The questionnaires include questions involving personal information such as age, gender, race, educational levels, course/programme,

and payment method. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire ensuring that respondents were informed of the nature and research purposes, as well objectives. **(Appendix B)**

4.5.1. Pre-testing

Pte-testing of the questionnaire is an important step in the entire research process. According to Churchill and Lacobucci (2005: 254) the real test of the questionnaire is how it performs under actual conditions of data collection. Pre-testing ensures that the questionnaire has been designed to perform the function it was intended for, and the data collected is relevant and accurate.

The process of pre-test may be necessary to make amendments to the questionnaire and to test the face validity of the survey instrument. Firstly, the questionnaire was checked and evaluated by the supervisor. Then an appropriate pre-test was conducted amongst 10 N6 Business Studies students in a Durban FET college. The result of pre-testing provided valuable information for avoiding ambiguous questions and the instrument was refined accordingly for the final stage.

4.6. Data Collection

According to Churchhill and Iacobucci (2005:167), data collection is an important part of a problem-solving process. As this study was descriptive in nature, which concentrates on the population from which the sample has been drawn, a survey method was used to obtain quantitative, primary data.

The questionnaires were personally to students by the researcher together with a letter of consent and were collected in the same manner. According to Welman et al. (2006:281-284), questionnaires enable the organising of the questions and receiving replies without actually having to talk to any respondents. Questionnaires were derived from the SERVQUAL instrument.

4.6.1. Data Collection Process

Permission to conduct research in all nine FET colleges was granted by the DoE-KZN (**Appendix A**), and the letter of permission was sent to FET college principal/CEOs/Rectors, requesting permission to conduct interviews (**Appendix C**), along with the letter of information and consent, which was also presented to each respondents **(Appendix B)**. The researcher collected the data as per the DoE-KZN terms and conditions. The data was collected on campus and in groups interviews from May 2012 to August 2012.

An in-campus group method of collection was used in this research. Wellman and Kruger (2005: 152) are of the opinion that collecting data from a group of people has many advantages, namely:

- A captive audience, in this instance, students were available;
- Since a single person is required to provide instructions in one room, the cost per question is much lower than that of a personal interview;
- The researcher is in full control of the questionnaire. The session is arranged with permission from the appropriate authorities (in this case lecturers/HoD) so that no respondents have an excuse for not completing the questionnaires; and
- The researcher is available to answer any questions about the completions of questionnaires immediately.

Three hundred and one questionnaires were completed by respondents; and in cooperation with the college principals, two suitable groups per FET college were chosen, one for the new curricula NCv, (Level 2-Level 4) and another one for the old curricula of NATED (N4-N6) students.

4.7. DATA ANALYSIS

Welman and Kruger (2003: 194) state that, once the research has been conducted according to a planned design, the results obtained must be interpreted. The main purpose of data analysis is to interpret and draw conclusions from the collected data.

The primary data, collected from the sample size of 301 completed questionnaires, were captured onto a Microsoft Excel spread-sheet and then converted for analysis, with the statistical software package SPSS version 20.0.

On completion of the data entry, data were verified and descriptive and inferential statistics were extracted from the study

4.7.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics describe the organising and summarising of quantitative data. Univariate and Bivariate analysis are most appropriate for descriptive statistics. Univariate analysis is concerned with the measure of dispersion. The most appropriate measure for interval data is the mean and the most appropriate for dispersion of interval data is the standard deviation. Bivariate analysis concerns the measurement of two variables (Lind, Marchal, and Mason, 2001: 6).

Descriptive data analysis includes summarised tables, measures of central tendency (mean), dispersion quantities, tables, charts, and graphs to describe, organise, summarise and present raw data (Curwin Slater, 2008: 11).

4.7.2. Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics are used to gain knowledge about the structural relationships among variables. According to Leedy and Ormord (2005: 30) it draws conclusion about the complete population by quantifying data collected from a sample.

4.7.3. T-Test

The independent t-test is the most appropriate, parametric test for a comparison of the means, and tests for any significant difference between the two variables. The t-test was used in this study, while the primary data collated, analysed and concluding discussions, are based on the results obtained (Lind et al., 2001: 348). In this study, the paired t-test was carried out to test the significant difference between the two means of expectations and perceptions.

4.7.4. Chi square

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005: 231) state that, chi-squares determine if the discreet classes into which an interval or ratio variable are grouped, are statistically significantly related to another variable, and that the relationship is not caused by chance. In this the Chi-square was used to calculate the expectations and perceptions mean of all five dimensions; reliability; responsiveness; assurance; empathy and tangibles.

4.7.5. Cronbach Apha

According to the Academic Technology Services at the University of Los Angeles (ULCA Academic Technology Services 2007) the Cronbach's alpha measures how well a set of items (or variables) measures a single, uni-dimensional, latent construct. When data have a multidimensional structure, Cronbach's alpha will usually be low. Technically speaking, Cronbach's alpha is not a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (or consistency). Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as ‘acceptable’ (ULCA Academic Technology Services 2007).

In this study, the overall reliability scores for each section are high (0.936 for Expectations and 0.914 for Perceptions). This indicates a high degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for the different categories of this research. All of the categories have, acceptable (high) reliability values.

4.8. Validity

Validity and reliability are terms one encounters throughout the research process and are primarily used in connection with measuring instruments. Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure. According to De Vos (2002: 167) there are four types of validity:

- Face Validity - refers to whether the statements are appropriate; relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher;
- Content validity - the accuracy with which an instrument measures the contents being studied;
- Criterion validity - determined by relating the performance of the measure against another, with the second measure checking the accuracy of the first measure; and
- Construct validity - the degree to which the content of the study is actually measured by the questionnaire.

In this study all of the above-mentioned validation methods were utilized. The following actions were taken to ensure validity:

- The questionnaire was based on the SERVQUAL measurement theory, which was presented in chapter three;
- The questionnaire was subjected to academics and professionals in the field of Marketing, and the opinion of erudite individuals was taken into account in the form of a pilot study; and
- The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot group, who had characteristics similar to those of the target group.

4.9. Reliability

According to Welman et al. (2008) reliability is achieved when the data collection procedure can be repeated with the same results. Further, Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 29) maintained that reliability can be seen as the consistency of performance of the measuring instrument. In other words, apart from delivering accurate results, the measuring instrument must deliver similar results consistently. Saunders et al. (2003: 106) stated that there are four threats to reliability:

- Subject error – choose a neutral time for respondents to complete the questionnaire;

- Subject bias – respondents may be answering what the interviewer wants to hear;
- Observer error – the different approaches to eliciting answers; and
- Observer bias – as with observer error, with different people interpreting the same research, there may be different approaches to interpreting the replies.

In this study, the researcher employed the following measures to ensure the reliability of the study under investigation:

- A pre-test study of the questionnaire was done to make certain that all questions and statements were both relevant and easily understood;
- The questionnaires ensured the anonymity of respondents;
- The questionnaires used a closed-ended question format; and
- Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure reliability of measurement, a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as 'acceptable' (ULCA Academic Technology Services 2007).

Introduction to SAS. UCLA: Academic Technology Services, Statistical Consulting Group, accessed November 24, 2007)

4.10. Conclusion

The research methodology used in this study was presented in this chapter. The research study was descriptive in nature, using the amended SERVQUAL instrument to assess student's expectations and perceptions towards FET colleges in KZN. The chapter presented the research methods applied, sampling design, questionnaire design, data collection methods, data analysis, and reliability as well as validity analyses.

The following chapter will present the findings from the empirical study, which will discuss and analyse the results, based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

In chapter four, the research design, sampling technique, data collection methods and questionnaire design were discussed. The purpose of this chapter is to present and interpret the findings of the empirical study at hand. In this chapter, both descriptive and inferential statistics are used to explore the relationship between student's expectations and perceptions towards KZN-FET colleges. All statistical results from the data, collected from the respondents (students), were analysed with SPSS, version 20.0.

The results from this study firstly present all demographic information of 301 respondents (students) who are registered full-time at FET colleges in KZN in the form of graphs, charts, percentages, dimensions and gap scores. The T-test, chi-square and Cronbach alpha tests were used to determine the relations or differences between student's expectations and perceptions of KZN FET colleges.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics based on the biographical information of the respondents. The descriptive statistics include the various techniques used to summarise the data. These include tables, charts, and summary statistics which are all used to illustrate the frequencies and percentages of the findings of this study (Welman et al. 2005: 229)

The total number of respondents who completed the questionnaires was 301. Table 5.1 illustrates the sample size per FET college in KZN that participated in this survey.

Table 5.1: Sample size

No	**FET College**	**Planned Sample**	**Achieve NCv**	**Achieve Nated**	**Achieved** Sample	Response Rate
1	*College A*	50	30	20	50	100%
2	*College B*	50	25	25	50	100%
3	*College C*	55	25	30	55	100%
4	*College D*	52	30	22	52	100%
5	*College E*	46	25	21	46	100%
6	*College F*	48	25	23	48	100%
Total	*6 Colleges*	*301*	*160*	*141*	*301*	100%

5.3. Demographic Details of Respondents

In this section, the demographic profile of the 301 respondents is discussed, including racial composition, age, gender, highest qualification before entering a FET college, the manner in which tuition fees are paid, and the programme for presently registered for. The importance of obtaining respondents' demographical characteristics fulfils the research objective, which was to identify demographic differences according to student perceptions and expectations in the FET sector.

In addition to the SERVQUAL questionnaire, respondents were asked eight demographical questions relating to the following:

- Race;
- Age;
- Gender;
- Highest qualification before registering at FET College;
- Method of payment for FET course/programme;
- Nated level registered at FET; and
- NCv level registered at FET.

5.3.1. Race

The composition of the sample, in terms of race, is presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Racial composition of the respondent

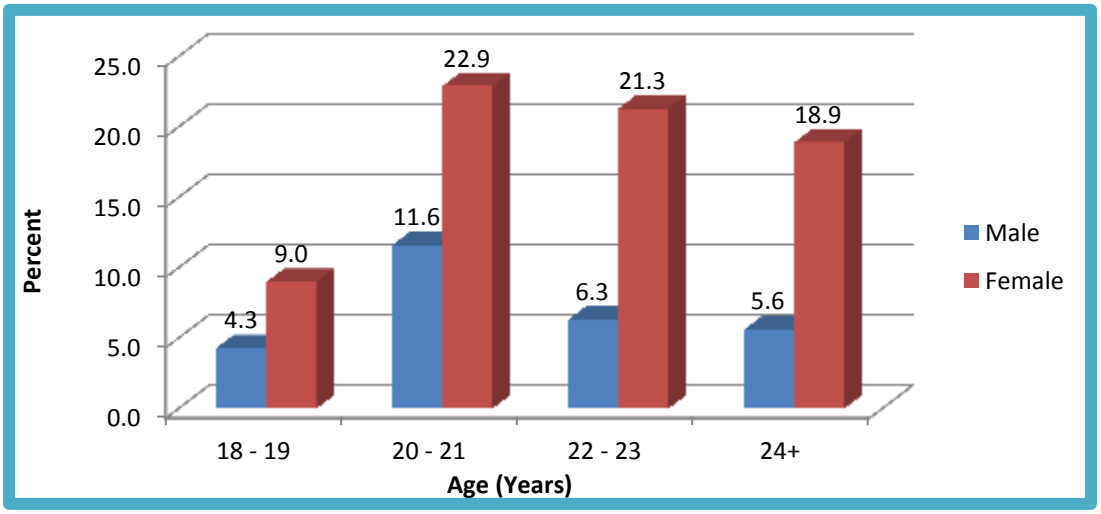
	Frequency	Percent
African	293	97.3
Indian	6	2.0
Coloured	2	.7
Total	301	100.0

The majority of the respondents are African. Race can be thus be treated as a constant for the biographical analysis. The race composition of respondents in this study was presented by the following groups: African n = 293 or 97.3 percent; followed by Indian n = 6 or 2.0 percent and Coloured n = 2 or 7 percent no white students were found.

5.3.2. Age and Gender

The age and gender of the sample in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Demographic Age and Gender



The majority of respondents, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 were female (72.1 percent). This pattern clearly shows more female students are attending FET colleges, than male students.

The demographic variable of age was categorised into four groupings, namely, 18 to19, 20 to 21, 22 to 23 and 24 and above. The largest group of 104 was from the 20 to 21 year age group, with the 22 to 23 year age group accounting for 80, while the group of 24 years and above accounted for 74. The balance of 40 respondents were in the 18 to 19 years age group. These results are illustrated in Table 5.7, as percentages.

5.3.3. Qualification before registering at FET

The qualifications of respondents, before registering with FET college are shown in Figure 5.2.

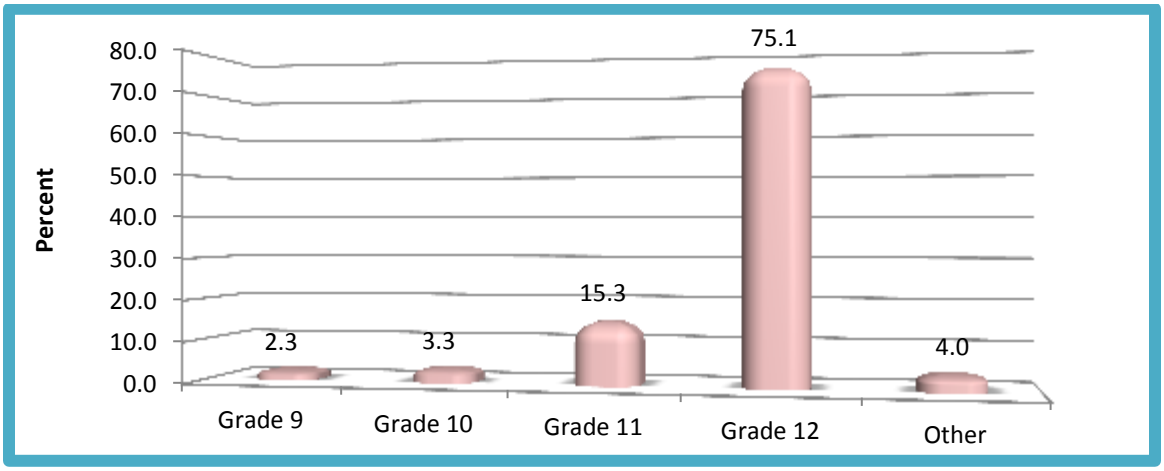


Figure 5.2: Qualification before registering at FET College

As illustrated in Figure 5.2, three-quarters of the respondents (75.1 percent) had completed Grade 12 before registering with FET, while 2.3 percent had completed grade nine, which is the minimum entry level for NCv at FET. This is followed by only 3.3 percent who had completed grade 10, which meets the NCv programme

requirements. This shows that the majority of students registered at FET colleges, had already passed grade 12.

5.3.4. Method of paying at FET

The manner in which respondents pay for their studies at FET college, is illustrated in Figure 5.3.

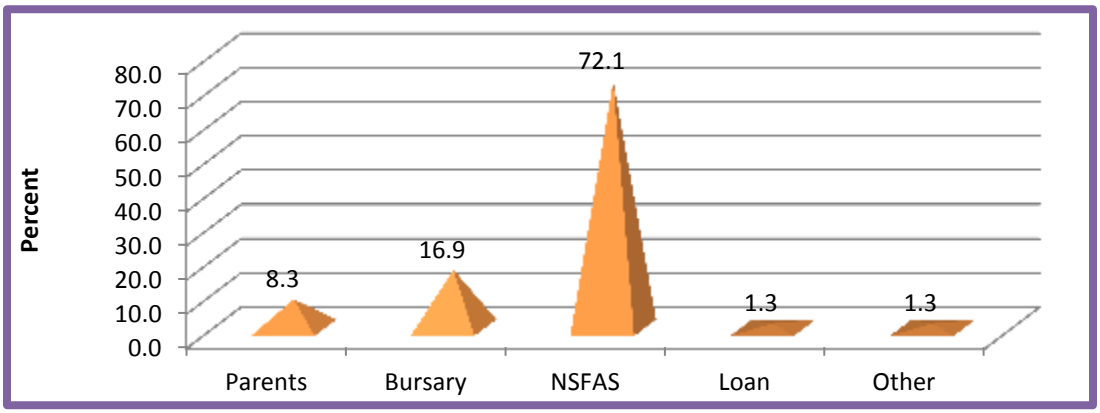


Figure 5.3: Method of paying for tuition at FET

Nearly 90 percent of the respondents have access to external funding, either via a bursary (16.9 percent) or NSFAS (72.1 percent). A small number (8.3 percent) of respondent's fees are covered by parents, while only (1.3 percent) of the respondent fees are paid by students loan or other external means of funding.

5.3.5. Nated registered

The N level that the respondents (students) are registered for at FET, for the Nated programme, is shown in Figure 5.4.

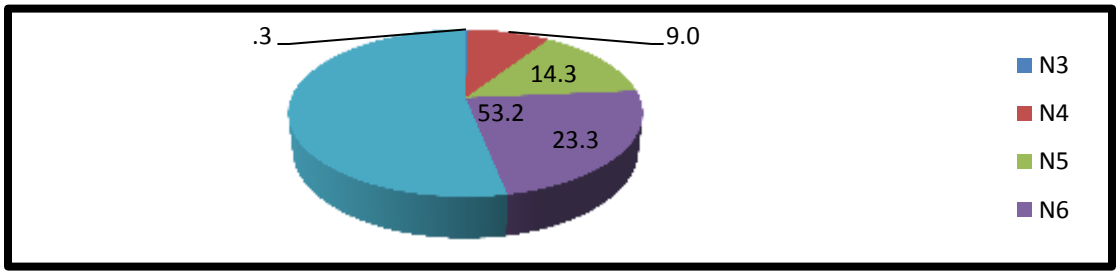


Figure 5.4: Nated level registered at FET

Of the 141 Nated students, more than half of the respondents (53.2 percent) are on the NCV programme. Less than one percent (0.3 percent) had registered for N3, nine percent were registered for N4, and 14.3 percent at N5 level with less than a quarter (23.3 percent) registered for the N6 Nated programme.

5.3.6. NCv level registered at FET

Respondents NCv level that are registered for, is illustrated in Figure 5.5.

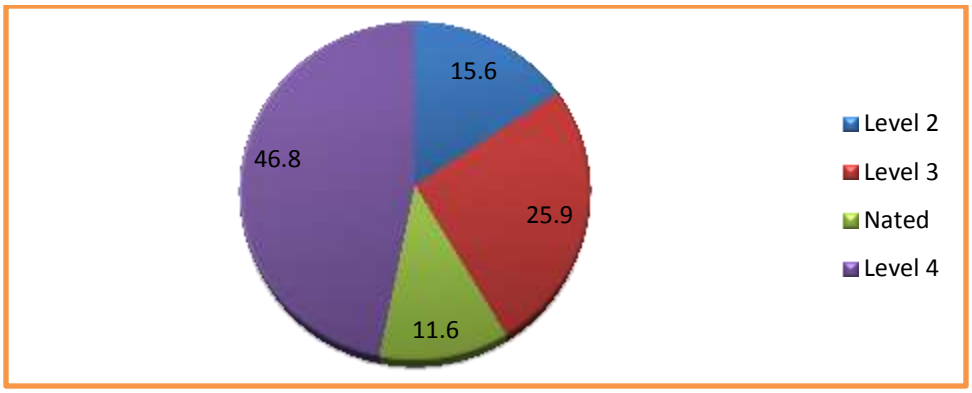


Figure 5.5: NCv level registered at FET

From a total of 160 respondents (students) registered for NCv 15.6 percent were at level 2, followed by level 3 with 25.9 percent and level 4, which was the highest, with 46.8 percent.

5.4. Inferential Analysis

5.4.1. The result of reliability measurement test

Cronbach's alpha measures how well a set of items (or variables) measures a single uni-dimensional latent construct. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was measured for reliability purposes.

Reliability was computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects (Table 5.3). A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered as ‘acceptable’ (UCLA: Academic Technology Services, 2007)

Table 5.3: Expected and perceived level for FET colleges in KZN

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	
	Expectations	Perceptions
Tangibles	.664	.588
Reliability	.834	.808
Responsiveness	.783	.775
Assurance	.774	.722
Empathy	.848	.800
Overall	.936	.914

According to Table 5.3, the overall reliability scores for each section are high (0.936 for Expectations and 0.914 for Perceptions). This indicates a high degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for the different categories in this research. All of the categories have acceptable reliability values, except for Tangibles which is in the vicinity of 0, 6. This implies that reliability was acceptable, expected outcome, as the questionnaire was based on the widely used, and reliable, SERVQUAL instrument.

5.5. Dimension Analysis with Gap Scores

The mean scores for each statement, as well as the gap scores (which are the differences between the Expectations and Perceptions) for each component are illustrated per dimension by means of tables with a separate graph showing a combined or overall analysis.

5.5.1. The Tangibles dimension

According to Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006: 120), the quality dimension of tangibles is related to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications. Tangibles provide physical representation or images of the service that the customer will use to evaluate quality. In Table 5.4 and Figure 5.6 tangible factors expected and perceived by the FET college students, in addition to the relevant gap for each dimension are reflected.

Table 5.4: Expected and perceived tangibles scores

		E	P	Gap
Excellent FET college will have modern looking equipment	Q8	4.84	3.02	-1.82
The physical facilities at excellent FET college will be visually appealing	Q9	4.68	2.21	-2.47
Employees at excellent FET college will be neat-appearing	Q10	4.29	3.95	-0.34
Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually at an excellent FET college	Q11	4.95	3.52	-1.43
	Average	4.69	3.18	-1.51

The expected and perceived tangibles graphical values-output are depicted in the Figure 5.6.

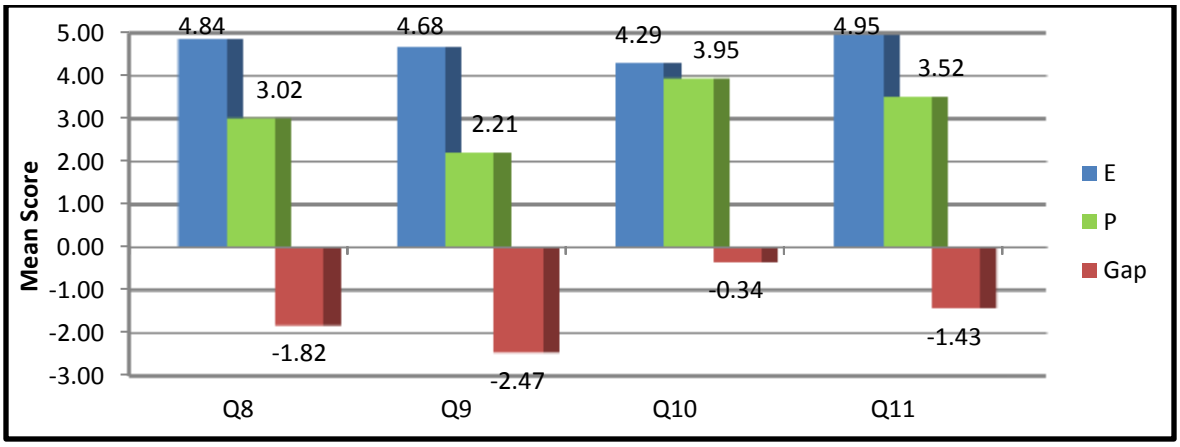


Figure5.6: Expected and perceived tangibles graph

Question 8: FET Colleges have modern looking equipment.

The data reflect the expectations and perceptions of the respondents in terms of FET colleges providing modern-looking equipment (Table 5.4). The expectations mean score was 4.84 and the perceived mean score was 3.02. Figure 5.6 shows the mean gap score for this element was -1.82. This finding reveals that the gap is large and it can therefore be concluded that FET College students are not satisfied with the equipment of the FET colleges.

Question 9: FET College have visually appealing physical facilities.

The aim of this question was to establish if student expectations and perceptions with regards to whether FET colleges provide appealing equipment. In Table 5.4, the respondents mean score for expectations and perceptions are illustrated as being 4.68 and perceived at 2.26. The mean gap score for this question is depicted in Figure 5.6 at -2.47. It important to note that, from the result in this question, this gap is the largest in this sequence. This implies that students are not satisfied with the level of appeal of FET physical facilities. It is this issue of physical facilities that contributes most to the negative tangibles gap.

Question 10: FET employees are neat-appearing.

In Figure 5.6, the first two questions focus on a physical structure and equipment, while Question 10 deals specifically with the organisations personel. As indicated in Table 5.4 the respondents mean score of employee's appearance for expectations and perceptions were 4.29 and 3.95 respectively, the gap is therefore -0.34. In comparison with other gap in this dimension, this question shows the smallest gap. The result indicates that neatness of employees is less of a problem in the tangible dimension.

Question 11: Material associated with FET College is visual appealing.

The data reflected in Figure 5.6 reveal the expectations and perceptions of the respondents in this study, with regard to visual attractiveness and appeal of FET College material, associated with facilities. The findings indicate the expectations and perceptions, which were 4.95 for expected and 3.52 for perceive. The mean gap for this question was a negative mean score of -1.43, which is relatively high and, would suggest that the material associated with FET colleges are not appealing.

In the tangible dimension, the assessed average Gap is -1.51, which would have been larger had it not been for the small gap for question 10. This indicates that students are very unhappy with the visual appeal at FET colleges in KZN as illustrated by respondents' unhappiness with the visual appeal of the physical facilities, as indicated by the large gap of -2.47. There is some level of discontent with the available materials and equipment as well.

Summary of Tangibles

It is observed that the average score for the tangible dimension was 4.69 for the expected scores. This average shows a fair level of agreement with the question that constitutes this dimension. Almost all of the expected scores are similar to the average score. These findings indicate that students believe FET institutions should have an acceptable level of tangibility (in terms of FET layout designs, physical facilities, equipment, personnel appearance, and communicational materials).

Respondents perception average score was 2.77. In comparison with the expectation score, it can said that there was a higher level of agreement for expectation than perception, which resulted in this large gap. Personal appearance is an important factor to the customer, in their assessment of the service provider. Chowdhary and Prakash (2007: 495) maintain that tangibility is an important issue with service that requires more visible action; that is people-processing and possession-processing.

5.5.2. The Reliability Dimension

The following questions were used to assess the respondents expectations and perceptions of reliability of FET colleges in KZN. Figure 5.7 and Table 5.6 show the expected and perceived mean scores of FET colleges for the reliability dimension. This dimension effectively measures the timeous solving and giving attention to customer (student) problems.

Table 5.5: Expected and perceived reliability scores

		E	P	Gap
When an excellent FET college promise to do something by a certain time, they do	Q12	4.45	2.41	-2.05
When a student has a problem, an excellent FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it	Q13	4.47	2.89	-1.57
An excellent FET college will perform the service right the first time	Q14	4.46	2.99	-1.48
An excellent FET college will provide the service at the time they promise, they promise to do so	Q15	4.07	2.57	-1.50
An excellent FET college will insist on error free records	Q16	4.36	2.99	-1.37
	Average	4.36	2.77	-1.59

Expected and perceived reliability values-output are graphically depicted in Figure 5.7 below.

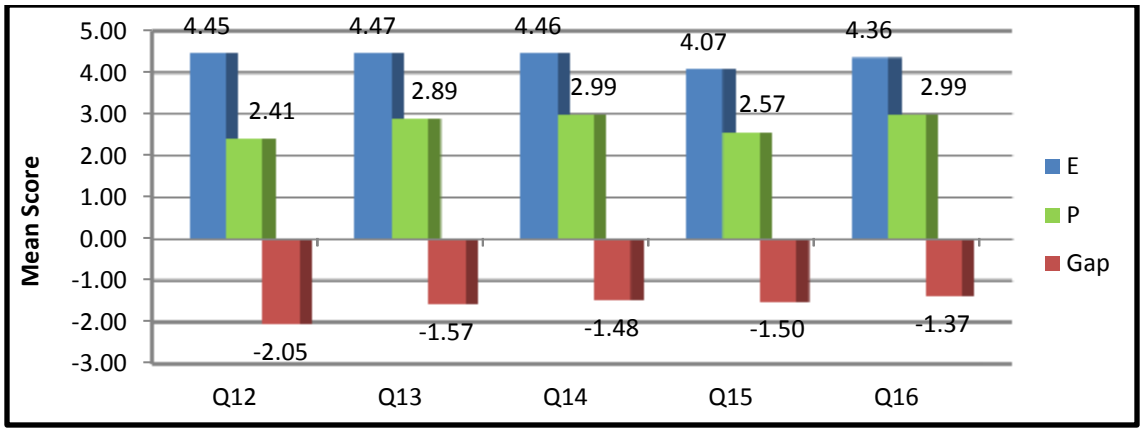


Figure 5.7: Expected and perceived reliability graph

Question 12: FET colleges when they promise to do something by a certain time, they do so.

Question two, aimed to determine whether customers (students) can trust FET college employees to deliver on time. As indicated by the responses in Figure 5.7 and Table 5.5, the respondent's mean score for the delivery on promises were 4.45 for expectations and 2.41 for perceptions. The mean gap score was fairly large at -2.05, which indicates that FET employees do not meet student's expectations and perceptions when it comes to timeous delivery on promises made to them. Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006: 129), define the importance of reliability in an organisation, as the ability to perform the promised service both dependently and accurately. As per the literature, this element is one of the important factors of the five factors in the SERVQUAL dimension.

Question 13: When a student has a problem, the FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it.

The mean score, in terms of the organisation showing interest in solving customers (students) problems, is illustrated in Figure 5.7 and Table 5.5, as 4.47 and 2.89 respectively for expectations and perceptions. In addition, the mean gap score was -1.57, which indicates a level of dissatisfaction by respondents with FET Colleges

employees showing interest in solving problems. Students experiences, Chowdhary and Prakash (2007: 495) point out that problem resolution is a key dimension, when evaluating service quality in a service organisation FET employees should, therefore improve this element. As stated in the literature, this element of reliability is important as consumers will judge the organisation negatively if it is not improved.

Question 14: FET Colleges perform the service right, the first time. (e.g Student registration, receipts, payment, enquiries)

The aim of this question was to assess FET colleges' commitment to service delivery. The data shown in Table 5.5 and Figure 5.7 denotes the mean score for expectations and perceptions, in terms of performing the service precisely, the first time, as 4.46 for respondents' expectations and 2.99 for their perceptions. The mean gap score was -1.48, which is large, which suggests that the respondents are not satisfied with services being performed precisely and accurately.

Question 15: FET College employees will provide the service at the time they promise.

Question 15 aims to determine whether FET colleges provide the quality of service to customers (students) timeously as promised to them. As indicated in Table 5.5 and Figure 5.7, the expected score was 4.07 with the perceived score at 2.57. This illustrates that the expectation was exceeded, resulting in a negative mean gap score of -1.50, which reveals that students were dissatisfied with FET college service delivery. As per the literature, Blose and Tankersley (2004: 78) state that organisations are evaluated on the extent to which services are timeously delivered.

Question 16: An excellent FET will insist on error free records.

The aim of this question is to determine if whether FET Colleges deliver services to insist on error free records and maintain excellent service to students. As indicated in Table 5.5 the respondents' expectations and perceptions were 4.36 and 2.99 respectively. The mean gap score was -1.37, implying that this element of commitment was not achieved.

Summary of Reliability

The overall gap score of -1.59 is similar to the individual gaps for all statements, except for Question 12, which showed a larger score than that of the average gap in this dimension. Respondents were not satisfied that the FET college did not keep to its delivery time promises. All of the other statements also yielded fairly large gaps. This indicates that the students were unsatisfied with FET colleges not keeping to their promises with regard to delivery of services.

Reliability is considered to be the most important of the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006: 129) define reliability as the ability to perform the promise to deliver services both dependently and accurately. In this study, the reliability dimension had the largest gap across all five dimensions. The results, therefore, imply that FET colleges have not managed to perform adequately in the service quality dimension.

5.5.3. The Responsiveness dimension

The questions in this dimension probe the skills and abilities of FET employees, as to how they interact with their customers (students). Figure 5.8 and Table 5.6 illustrate the responsiveness scores of the expected and perceived perceptions of students at FET Colleges in KZN. In addition, the mean gap score for each dimensional factor is given.

Table 5.6: Expected and Perceived Responsiveness

		E	P	Gap
Employees of excellent FET college will tell students exactly when services will be performed	Q17	3.73	2.31	-1.42
Employees of excellent FET college will give prompt service to students	Q18	3.70	2.22	-1.49
Employees of excellent FET college will always be willing to help students	Q19	3.85	2.43	-1.42
Employees of excellent FET college will never be too busy to respond to students' requests	Q20	3.52	2.15	-1.38
	Average	3.70	2.28	-1.42

Expected and perceived reliability values-output are depicted graphically in Figure 5.8.

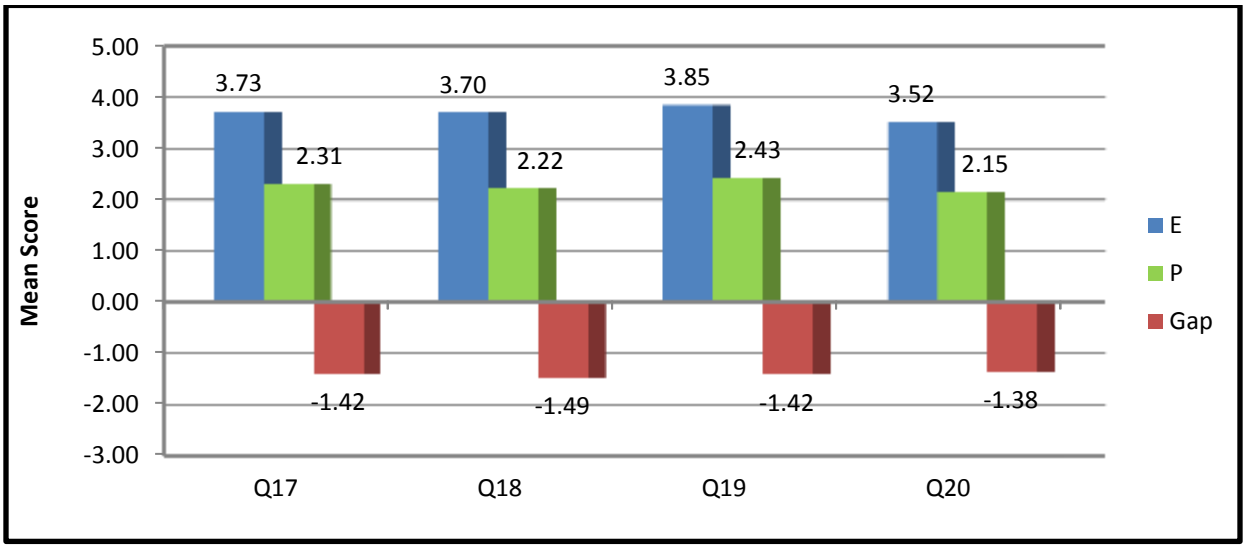


Figure 5.8: Expected and Perceived Responsiveness graph

Question 17: Employees of FET Colleges will tell students exactly when services will be performed.

This question aimed to measure whether the employees of FET colleges inform students exactly when services are being rendered. As indicated in Figure 5.8 and Table 5.6, a score of 3.73 for respondent's expectations was achieved with a score of 2.31 for perceptions regarding FET employees telling students exactly when services will take place. The mean gap score for this element in this dimension was -1.42 an indication of the level of dissatisfaction with FET college employees' communication about service delivery times. This suggests that further supervision and follow ups, as well training, are needed.

Question 18: Employees of excellent FET colleges will give prompt service to students.

This question assesses the speed and timelines within which the FET organisation delivers service to students. Table 5.6 and Figure 5.8 reveal the mean score for expectations as 3.70 and for perceptions at 2.22. In addition, the mean gap score was a negative of -1.49 for prompt service delivery. This suggests the level of unhappiness

and dissatisfaction by the students, with FET college employees failure to achieve this element of service delivery.

Question 19: FET College employees will always be willing to help students.

This question measures the FET college employees' willingness, kindness and devotion to helping students with their daily requests. Table 5.6 indicates the respondents overall expectations and perceptions in this element, which are 3.85 and 2.43, respectively. The mean gap score for employee willingness to help students was -1.42, which indicates that employees need to pay attention to this and training should be provided to all employees regarding this important factor.

Question 20: FET college employees will never be too busy to respond to students' requests.

The aim of this question is to measure the level of FET college employees' commitment to service delivery in putting the customer (student) first. The results indicate, in Table 5.6, the respondents' expectations and perceptions towards this factor, which was 3.52 for expectations and 2.15 for perceptions. This finding shows that students' expectations again exceeded their perceptions. The mean gap score was -1.42, signifying that FET colleges did not manage to achieve the required service level and students were dissatisfied.

Summary of Responsiveness

With regard to responsiveness the overall gap is 1.42, which is the second smallest, compared to Empathy. The overall levels of expectations were lower than in the previous dimensions, with an average of 3.70.

The gap sizes are fairly constant across the dimension which indicates the level of student dissatisfaction, regarding FET colleges commitment to provide quality service.

5.5.4. The Assurance Dimension

Arasli et al. (2005: 45) define assurance as 'an employee's knowledge, level of courtesy, and the ability to inspire trust and confidence in customers. This "serves as an important aspect of service". Assurance relates to the organisation's capability to deliver the output in terms of knowledge, politeness, and trustworthiness of employees. The expected and perceived reliability values-output are depicted in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Expected and Perceived Assurance		E	P	Gap
The behaviour of employees in an excellent FET college will instil confidence in students	Q21	4.69	3.43	-1.26
Students of an excellent FET college will feel safe in their transactions	Q22	4.56	2.27	-2.29
Employees of an excellent FET college will be consistently courteous with students	Q23	4.57	3.28	-1.30
Employees of an excellent FET college will have the knowledge to answer students' questions	Q24	4.89	3.47	-1.43
	Average	4.68	3.11	-1.57

The expected and perceived assurance values-output of respondents are illustrated in Figure 5.9.

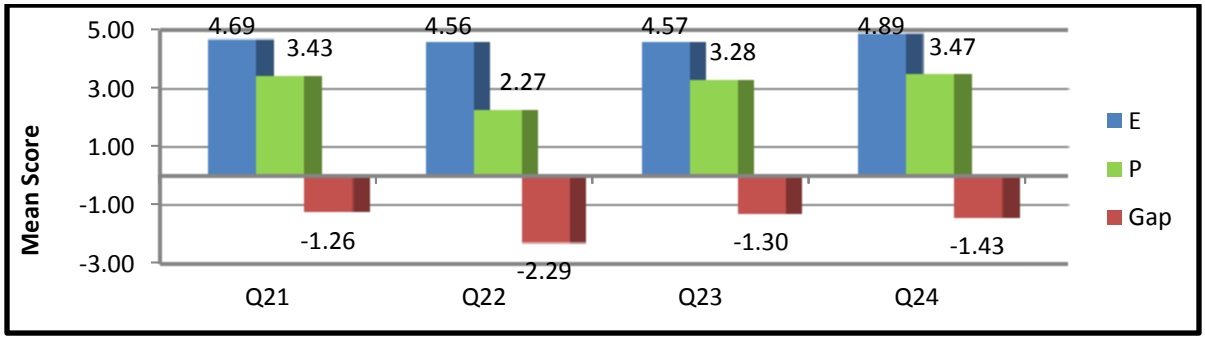


Figure 5.9: Expected and Perceived Assurance graph

Question 21: The behaviour of employees at FET College instils confidence in students.

The aim of question 21 was to assess whether FET college employees behaviour inspires and instils confidence among FET college students. As indicated in Table 5.7, the obtained data reveal the mean score for expectations and perceptions, as 4.69 for expected and 3.45 for perceived. In addition, the mean gap score was -1.26. This finding implies that assurance was not achieved.

Question 22: Students feel safe in making their transactions at FET College.

Figure 5.9 depicts the students' expectations and perceptions with regard to how safe and assured respondents feel, regarding confidentiality in dealing with FET employees. As illustrated in Table 5.7, the respondents' mean score for expectations was 4.56, and 2.27 for perceptions. The finding indicates that expectations exceeded perceptions, resulting in a large, negative gap of -2.29, which is the largest in this dimension. The implication is that FET college employees also need to improve their relationships and sense of loyalty displayed with students.

Question 23 FET college employees are consistently courteous with students.

This questions aims to determine whether FET college employees are consistently courteous with students (customers). Table 5.7 reveals the student expectations' and perceptions to be 4.57 for expected and 3.28 for perceived, with a mean gap score of -1.30 which suggests a lack of consistent, courteous service.

Question 24: Employees of FET colleges have the knowledge to answer students' questions.

The FET College employees' knowledge about FET operational activities, when responding to queries from students (customers) is assessed by Question 24. Expectation and perception scores, revealed by Table 5.7 for this question, were 4.89 and 3.47 respectively, with a mean gap negative score of -1.43. This finding indicates the lack of students' satisfaction with this element, which suggests the need for better induction programmes for all staff at education service centres.

Summary of Assurance dimension

The large overall gap score can be attributed mainly to Question 22, which refers to the safety levels that respondents feel when dealing with the FET College. The average scores for the perceptions are slightly more than the middle value of 3.0. This means that there were slightly more respondents who agreed (rather than disagreed) with the statements. This dimension indicates that student were not satisfied with the manner in which FET college employees conduct and deliver service. It is important to note that this dimension was the second largest gap across all five dimensions.

5.5.5. The Empathy Dimension

Figure 5.10 and Table 5.8 illustrate respondents' expectations and perceptions and the mean gap scores for the Empathy dimension, with respect to care provided by FET college employees. Zeithaml and Bitner (2006: 195) maintain that empathy is the ability to experience another's feeling as one's own. Empathy is the organisation's ability to provide caring and personalised attention.

Table 5.8: Expected and Perceived Empathy graph		E	P	Gap
An excellent FET college will give students individual attention	Q25	4.50	3.15	-1.35
An excellent FET college will have operating hours convenient to all their students	Q26	4.26	3.36	-0.90
An excellent FET college will have employees who give students personal attention	Q27	3.90	3.17	-0.72
An excellent FET college will have their students' best interest at heart	Q28	4.41	3.02	-1.40
The employees of an excellent FET will understand the specific needs of their students	Q29	4.19	3.02	-1.17
	Average	4.25	3.14	-1.11

Expected and perceived empathy values-output are depicted in Figure 5.10.

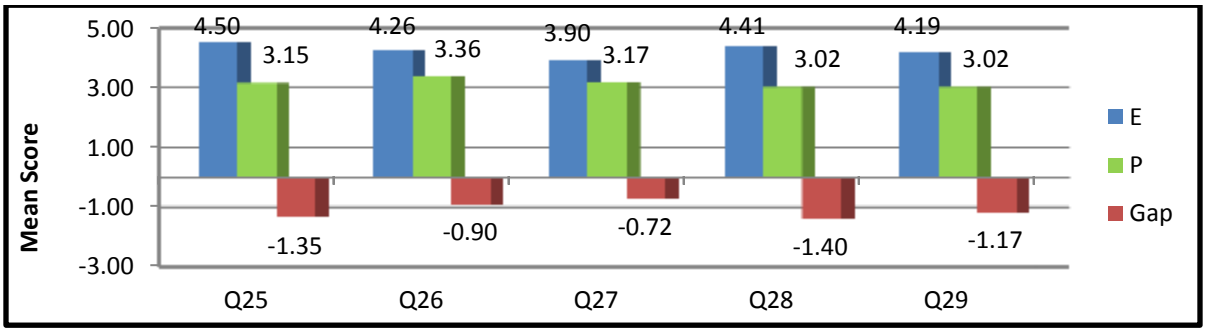


Figure 5.10: Expected and Perceived Empathy graph

Question 25: FET college employees give students individual attention.

This question aims to measure FET college employees' ability to provide individual attention to details. As shown in Table 5.8 and Figure 5.10, the data regarding respondents expectations and perceptions were rated at 4.50 for expected and 3.15 for perceived. The mean gap score was -1.35 which indicates the level of dissatisfaction with regard to delivery of service, according to individual needs. This factor requires immediate action by FET college employees.

Question 26: FET colleges have operating hours convenient to all their students.

The measurement as to whether FET college operational times are convenient to students is addressed in this question. The results in Table 5.8 and Figure 5.10 for respondents' expectations and perceptions reveal scores of 4.26 and 3.36 respectively, with the second smallest mean gap of -0.90. This implies that students were not too dissatisfied with FET operating hours, although there were those who disagreed.

Question 27: FET college employees give students personal attention.

This question assesses the availability of FET college employees, to give students personal attention. As indicated in Table 5.8 and Figure 5.10, the data show scores of 3.90 for expectations and 3.17 for perceptions, with a mean gap score of -0.73. It important to note that, this gap was the smallest of the factors in the empathy

dimension, indicating the level of acceptance from respondents' point of view, towards this element.

Question 28: FET colleges have their students' best interest at heart.

The data in Table 5.8 and Figure 5.10 reveal the expectations and perceptions of respondents, in terms of FET college employees keeping and prioritising students' interests. Student ratings towards expectations and perceptions were 4.41 (expected) and 3.02 (perceived), with a mean gap score of -1.40. This finding indicates that FET colleges should put more emphasis on this element of service.

Question 29: FET college employees understand the specific needs of their students.

With regard to FET college employees' understanding their students specific needs, respondents mean scores for expectations and perceptions were 4.19 and 3.02 respectively (Table 5.8 and Figure 5.10) The mean gap score for this question was a negative at -1.17. This finding illustrates that students were slightly dissatisfied with this element, which FET colleges need to address.

Summary of Empathy dimension

This dimension has the smallest average gap at -1.11, across all five dimensions. This implies that respondents believe that employees show some empathy, but there is still some level of dissatisfaction in the employees' approach towards the respondents. FET college employees therefore need to improve their approachability, understanding student's needs, as well as open communication to students.

5.5.6. The Overall Gap Scores

The gap scores per dimension for the study are summarised in Table 5.9 with Figure 5.11 illustrating the summary of each gap scores' data obtained.

Table 5.9: Overall Expected and Perceived gap scores

	E	P	Gap
Tangibles	4.69	3.18	-1.51
Reliability	4.36	2.77	-1.59
Responsiveness	3.70	2.28	-1.42
Assurance	4.68	3.11	-1.57
Empathy	4.25	3.14	-1.11

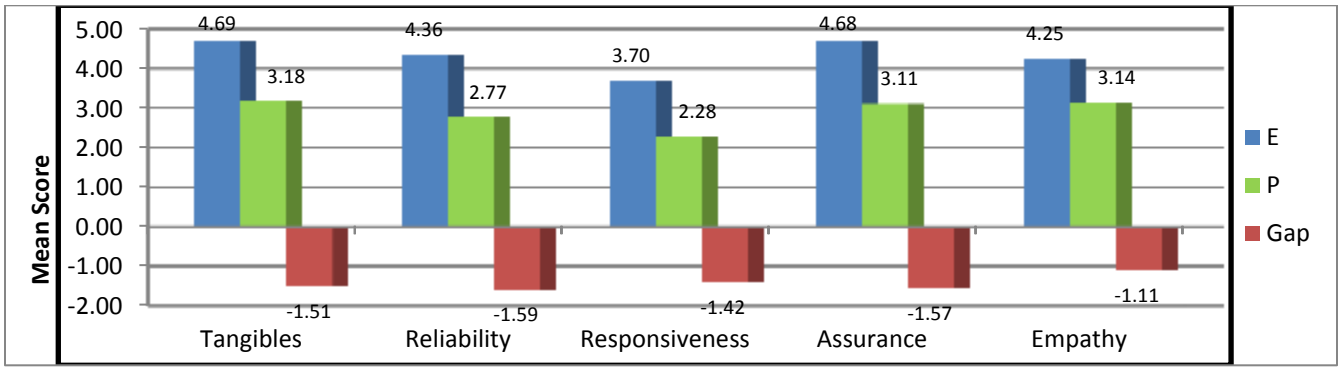


Figure 5.11: Overall Expected and Perceived gap scores

The overall expected and perceived gap scores for each dimension are shown in Figure 5.11 and Table 5.9. The general finding is that the first four dimensions show gaps that are fairly large.

The tangibles dimension showed the highest gaps in this dimension. The average gap was -1.51, which would have been larger had it not been for the small gap of -0.34 in question 10. This finding means that the students were unhappy about the ”physical facilities’, including the layout, materials associated with colleges, as well the equipment used. FET college management need to upgrade FET equipment, change the physical facilities, as well as the material associated with FET colleges, such as pamphlets and brochures. Changes to this would ensure students satisfaction.

The reliability dimension – the overall gap score yielded a fairly large gap of -1.59, which is similar to the individual gap for all statements except the first two questions in this dimension which was larger. It is important to note that reliability has the largest

gap across all four dimensions. This finding indicates the level of respondents' dissatisfaction with the fact that FET College do note deliver on their promises.

Reliability is the most important aspect in service delivery. In other words, the customers (students), "know what to expect and when they can expect it". FET management must provide and arrange training workshops for staff that interact with students. Staff in authority should be available, at all time, to answer and respond to students' enquiries. Schneider and White (2004: 144) define service performance to a customer (students) as the service being accomplished on time, in the same manner and without errors every time.

The responsiveness dimension – the level of agreements for expectations was lower than in the previous dimensions. The overall gap was -1.42, which is the second smallest, compared to empathy. This finding means that students were also unhappy that FET colleges were unable to communicate accurately and independently. As per the literature, responsiveness means the willingness to assist customers (students) and provide prompt service on a continuous basis. This call is for all administration, lecturing and management staff in the FET sector to initiate a teamwork effort in restoring the "winning heart and minds" campaign, by being able to provide services willingly.

The assurance dimension – the second largest gap score of -1.57, after reliability in this dimension, was mainly attributed to question 22 which refers to the level of safety that students feel when dealing with a FET College. This implies that an acceptable level of trustworthiness and confidence was not achieved. Assurance includes competence to perform the service, politeness and respect for the customer (students), effective communication, as well as the general attitude of putting the customers' interest first. Management should continuously provide training workshops for staff, as well as seminars about the importance of customer service.

The empathy dimension – this dimension had the smallest gap scores compared to all four dimensions, with a mean gap score of -1.11. Students believe that FET Colleges

show some empathy but there is still some level of dissatisfaction in the approach towards the students. FET college management must initiate the restoring and strengthening of relationships with students.

5.6. Significance Testing

5.6.1. T-test

It was hypothesised that there is a significant relationship between respondents biographical demographics and their expectations and perceptions towards FET colleges in KZN

The traditional approach to reporting a result requires a statement of statistical significance. A p-value is generated from a test statistic. A significant result is indicated with "$p < 0.05$". These values are highlighted in yellow in Table 5.10.

A paired t-test was performed to determine whether the differences between the overall Expected and Perceived scores were significant (Table 5.11).

Table 5.10 Paired T-test

		Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	An excellent FET college will have modern-looking equipment: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 2	The physical facilities at an excellent FET college will be visually appealing: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 3	Employees at an excellent FET college will be neat-appearing: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 4	Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually appealing at an excellent FET college Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 5	When an excellent FET college promise to do something by certain time, they do so: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 6	When a student has a problem, an excellent FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 7	An excellent FET college will perform the service right the first time: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 8	An excellent FET college will provide the service at the time they promise, they promise to do so: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 9	An excellent FET will insist on error free records: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 10	Employees of an excellent FET college will tell students exactly when services will be performed: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 11	Employees of an excellent FET college will give prompt service to students: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 12	Employees of an excellent FET college will always be willing to help students: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 13	Employees of an excellent FET college will never be too busy to respond to students' requests: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 14	The behavior of employees in an excellent FET college will instill confidence in students: Expected vs Perceived	.001
Pair 15	Students of an excellent FET college will feel safe in their transactions: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 16	Employees of an excellent FET college will be consistently courteous with students: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 17	Employees of an excellent FET college will have the knowledge to answer students' questions: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 18	An excellent FET college will give students individual attention: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 19	An excellent FET college will have operating hours convenient to all their students: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 20	An excellent FET college will have employees who give students personal attention: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 21	An excellent FET college will have their students' best interest at heart: Expected vs Perceived	.000
Pair 22	The employee of an excellent FET will understand the specific needs of their students: Expected vs Perceived	.000

As illustrated in Table 5.10. the results show that each pairing is significantly different. That implies that the means for expectations and perceptions are not the same and the direction of the differences can be determined from the gap scores in Table 5.9.

5.6.2. Chi square test

A chi square-test was performed to determine whether the biographical demographics differences between the overall Expected and Perceived scores were significant. The detailed Chi square results and statistics are provided in **(**A**ppendix E)**

5.6.2.1. Comparison of overall scores between students genders using Chi-square test

The comparisons between student's genders were conducted using a Chi-square test. The results indicated a significant difference among gender groups. The results indicate that the gender is 0.0222, and since this value is less than the level of significance of ($p<0.05$), it implies that the different genders did not have the same level for Tangible-perceptions.

5.6.2.2. Comparison of overall scores between race groups using Chi-square test

The results reflect the comparison between the race groups which were conducted using the chi-square test. A significant difference among the race groups is indicated, at a 95 percent level for Empathy-Perception ($p<0.05$).

5.6.2.3. Comparison of overall scores between age groups using Chi-square test

The comparison between the age groups were conducted using a Chi-square test. The result indicated a significant difference among the race groups at 95% level for Reliability-Perception ($p<0.05$).

5.6.2.4. Comparison of overall scores between the students method of paying for tuition fees using Chi-square test

The results show the comparison between the students method of paying for tuition fees, which were conducted using a Chi-square test. A significant difference was shown among the race groups by the results, at 95 percent level for Assurance-Expectation ($p<0.05$).

5.6.2.5. Comparison of overall scores between the NCv groups and levels registered using Chi-square test

The comparison between the NCv groups and levels registered for are reflected in the results, which were obtained using a Chi-square test. A significant difference was indicated among the race groups at a 95 percent level for Responsiveness-Expectation and Assurance-Expectation ($p<0.05$).

5.6.2.6. Comparison of overall scores between the Nated groups and levels registered using Chi-square test

The results reflect the comparison between the Nated groups and levels registered for, which were conducted using a chi-square test. The results indicated a significant difference among the race groups with a 95 percent level for Tangibles-Perception and Reliability-Perceptions ($p<0.05$).

5.7. Conclusion

According to Welman et al. (2005: 227), once the data has been collected, the researcher has to make sense of it. Thus, the results of the empirical study were presented and analysed with a discussion of the findings in the next chapter. Firstly, these findings indicated that the majority of the respondents were aged between 20-21 years and 72.1 percent are female. Secondly, the study showed that of the 160 respondents registered for NCv 46.8 percent were at Level 4, and of the 141 students registered for NATED, 23.3 percent were at N6 level. Lastly, the concept of measuring

the difference between respondents expectations and perceptions in the form SERVQUAL, which also measured the gap score for each dimension were useful.

The results indicated that expectations exceeded perceptions across all five dimensions and, therefore the gap scores between the expectations and perceptions of service quality in FET colleges were negative. These gaps are large, with Reliability which was the largest, followed by Assurance, Tangibles, Responsiveness and Empathy which was the smallest dimension.

The following chapter consists of the conclusions and recommendations, pertaining to the empirical finding of this study.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In chapter five, the results of the data from the sample of 301 respondents were presented and interpreted, based on the conceptual framework developed in the literature, with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The study aimed to research student expectations and perceptions toward FET colleges in KZN with respect to college of choice. To achieve this, the model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1994), SERVQUAL, was used, (DeMoranville and Biestock, 2003: 220). Chapter six encompasses the discussion of the results and findings with respect to a conclusion, implications, limitations and recommendation of the study objectives.

6.2. Conclusion: Research Findings

The study focused on identifying student expectation and perceptions towards FET colleges in KZN, with respect to college of choice. Silvestro (2005: 216**)** states that it is important to understand customers' (students) expectations, while the monitoring of changes in customer expectations and perception over time is critical to the delivery of service quality, which should be a starting point for any analysis of service points.

The results demonstrated that students' expectations and perceptions are both positive. However, since the perception score is less than the expectation score, the GAP is negative, which means that the size of the negative gap is important. The bigger the gap score, the bigger the difference is between Expectation and Perception. The study findings demonstrated that, in each of the five SERVQUAL dimensions negative quality gap scores were found. As shown in Table 5.9 and Figure 5.11 Reliability had the largest gap, followed by Assurance, then Tangibles, with lastly, Responsiveness, which proved to be the second smallest when compared to the Empathy dimension. These

negative gaps indicate a lack of fulfilling the service quality code by service centers at FET colleges, which requires management to take action.

According to Zeithmal and Bitner (2006: 60) any service quality improvement should be initiated by gaining an understanding of the nature of the gap between customer (students) expectations and perceptions (referred to as a gap in the service quality model).

6.3. Conclusion: Research Objectives

The achievement of the research objectives are herewith presented analysed and discussed.

6.3.1. Sub-objective 1: To identify the expectations of students towards FET.

Chapter three provided a literature review outlining an understanding of the essential characteristics of service, and the five dimensions of service quality. Students' expectations of service rendered at FET colleges were researched, tested and analysed in Chapter five. Student's expectations were measured according to the delivery of five service quality dimensions with study findings indicating that student's expectations towards FET colleges were high across all five service quality dimensions. As shown in Table 5.9, high expectations scores indicate that students expect excellent service at all times.

Within all five services quality dimensions, the responsive dimension had the lowest score; indicating that students' expectations for this dimension were slightly met but leaves room for improvement. This objective was, therefore, achieved: Tangibles was the highest (4.69); followed by Assurance (4.68); then Reliability (4.36); and Empathy (4.25), with the lowest being that of Responsiveness (3.70).

6.3.2. Sub-objective 2: To identify perceptions of students towards FET.

As per the literature review in Chapter three, the process of service quality delivery is influenced by five dimensions of service quality. Respondents were surveyed on all five dimensions, in terms of the actual perceived service quality of FET colleges in KZN. As shown in Table 5.10, the findings indicate that the perceptions scores were low across the five service quality dimensions. This indicates that the quality of service is perceived as poor. The level of dissatisfactions implies that students do not believe that the FET places much emphasis on being the institution of first choice in KZN. Therefore this objective was achieved (Tangibles 3.18; Empathy 3.14; Assurance 3.11; Reliability 2.77 and Responsiveness 2.28).

6.3.3. Sub-objective 3: To identify factors influencing enrolments in FET.

In Chapter two, an understanding, of the essential characteristics of the factors that influence prospective students to register with the institution of their choice is provided. The factors that influence students, to make an informed decision about which institution to register at, were researched locally and internationally. Chapter three indicates the concepts on measuring the difference between expectations and perceptions in the form of a SERVQUAL gap score which proved to be useful in assessing the level of service quality.

Table 5.10 indicates the findings on what students expect and compare these to the actual service perceived. Results indicate large negative Gap scores across all five service quality dimensions: the highest was Reliability (-1.59); Assurance (-1.57); Tangibles (-1.51); Responsiveness (-1.42) and the lowest was for Empathy (-1.11). The result implies that FET colleges in KZN are not meeting student needs timeously, accurately and independently. In order to improve student enrolments, the FET management priority ought to be continuously monitoring and closing of any service quality gaps in all five dimensions. This objective was achieved.

6.3.4. Sub-objective 4: To identify demographic differences according to student perceptions and expectations in FET.

The data in Chapter five were analysed in terms of Race, Gender, Age, Highest level at School completed before registering with an FET college, method of tuition fee payment, as well as the Programme/Course and level registered.

The significant relationship between the service qualities dimensions, with regard to the demographic profile of students at FET colleges is discussed briefly.

6.3.4.1. Gender

The analysed result shows that the majority of the respondents were females (72.1 percent). The research results also indicated that statistically there is a significant difference in perception by different gender groups of the Tangible dimension of service quality in FET colleges in KZN.

6.3.4.2. Race Groups

The empirical findings indicate that majority of respondents were Blacks (93.7 percent). The results reveal that statistically there is a significant difference in the perceptions of the Reliability dimension of service, within FET colleges in KZN.

6.3.4.3. Age

The majority of respondents were aged between 20 - 21 years and the findings reveal a statistically, significant difference in respondents' perceptions and expectations of the Reliability dimension of service in FET colleges in KZN.

6.3.4.4. Method of paying for tuition fees

The empirical findings from the chi-square test revealed, that, statistically, there are significant different perceptions and expectations towards the Assurance dimension ($p<0.05$). According to the findings there are groups whose tuition fees are paid by their parents, while others have access to bursaries, NSFAS and loans, and these groups differ in opinions. The main reasons could be ascribed to a delay in the process of

paying tuition fees either by NSFAS or Bursary-schemes, which cause students to continuously, enquire from front desk staff whether their fees have been paid.

6.3.4.5. NCv registered

Respondents registered in level 4 of the NCv (46. 8 percent) were shown to be dominant in this study. The empirical findings from the chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in the perceptions and expectations of Responsiveness-Expectation and Assurance-Expectation ($p<0.05$). The different opinions could be attributed to the fact that these are senior NCv students, who have more insight and knowledge of customer services at FET colleges in KZN.

6.3.4.6. NATED registered

The study showed that of the 53.2 percent students registered for the Nated programme, almost a quarter (23.3 percent) were registered for the N6 level. The empirical findings from the chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in respondents' perceptions and expectations of Tangibles-Perception and Reliability-Perceptions. It could be that N6 students have deeper understanding of the customer offered at the FET colleges, due to having been at the FET college for longer.

6.4. Conclusion: Research Problem

The business problem is that FET colleges are struggling to increase student enrolments, as there is a perception of FET colleges being a second choice institution. In addressing this problem, this empirical study has shown that there is room for improvement. With the aid of the SERVQUAL model students' expectations and perceptions were measured in five dimensions of service consisting of assurance, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. The empirical findings demonstrate that there is a negative gap in each of the five SERVQUAL dimension. The largest gap was found in reliability, followed by assurance, tangibles and the smallest was in empathy (-1.11).The study has indicated that, in order for FET college management to attract and increase the student population, the five service quality dimension shortfall/gap/discrepancies should be closed.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY GAPS AT FET

Research of this nature is of paramount importance to FET colleges, so that the institution can continuously review the appropriate, set strategies to be implemented, in order to restore, maintain and improve customer (students) service quality. This research focused on identifying student expectations and perceptions towards the FET sector in KZN. Based on the research findings, the results imply that there is room for improvement in all five dimensions measured. Therefore the following recommendations, appropriate to FET staff and management, are put forward:-

6.5.1. Tangibles

To close all the 'tangibility' Gaps, especially the largest identified in Table 5.9, the following recommendations are made:

- The physical appearance of FET facilities should be upgraded at services centers i.e campuses, in classes, offices, libraries, and FET halls in order to be visually appealing to students who are utilise this material.

- Management should work closely with the key departments such as procurement, supply chain, marketing and human resources on a regular basis, utilising research to assess, the physical facilities equipment in use and other material which are associated with FET colleges. They need to ensure that these are still compatible with customers, and certain criteria has to be setup, so that all facilities are evaluated in order to meet standard criteria.

6.5.2. Reliability

The recommendations, to close all the 'Reliability' Gaps, especially the largest identified in Table 5.9, is that staff and management should understand the importance of keeping promises and avoid overpromising. This could be achieved through, team-building,

workshops and team-work and will serve to ensure exceptional customer service for students.

6.5.3. Responsiveness

In order to close the ‘Responsiveness’ Gaps, the largest identified in Table 5.9, the following recommendations are made:

- Time frames: Management should improve time-frame management. This refers to, for instance, when students are applying for internal funding, such as the National Scheme Financial Aid Services (NSFAS), the remarking of scripts, rechecking, application for enrolment in a National diploma, certificate courses, refunds receipts, application credits, student registrations, and statement of results. Any delay with these matters cause and may add to student discomfort.

- FET management should realise the role of staff as markets, as well as market researchers which had been given little thought to date, along with the need of linking marketing with quality assurance, curriculum development and staff development. The role players will serve to measure performance, based on the rigid measures of customer satisfaction, and regularly monitor these measures in order to close the customer expectation and perception gaps.

6.5.4. Assurance

It is recommended that, in order to close all the ‘Assurance’ Gaps, especially the largest identified in Table 5.9, the following measures can be taken:

- Management should invite ‘suggestion/complains’ mechanisms within FET colleges campuses, as this will identify critical aspects of students concerns.

- Management must also consider introducing student portal mechanisms, where students can view their fees, account balances, examination result statuses, and year marks, instead of students queuing for these enquiries.
- Management should improve their communication by ensuring they have an up-to-date presence on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, as this will enable the flow of communication between staff and students.

6.5.5. Empathy

To close all the 'Empathy' Gaps, especially the largest identified in Table 5.9, it is recommended that:

- Management should provide training to all staff about the details of programmes on offer at FET colleges, such as duration, qualification verification, and any relationship between Universities and other FET colleges, in terms of students furthering their studies. These training induction programes should be for both lecturing and administration staff. This will enable staff to be more knowledgeable and able to answer what, where, how, when and why questions from the students.
- Management should allow each component/department/faculty to draw it own vision statement and mission. Allowing staff to participate in drawing up the campus vision and mission, will allow and instill the sense of a client-driven approach.
- Management should conduct research to understand student needs. This could be done and repeated annually, to ensure track is kept of students' changing needs.

6.6. Limitations

As with all empirical research, the present study had certain limitations.

- Data was obtained from only six FET colleges, therefore, the information and results were based on findings for only six FET colleges in KZN. As a result, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the whole of South Africa, as it is limited to KZN only.

- The study was restricted to full-time students of 18 years and older, therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of FET colleges in South Africa.

6.7. Recommendation For Future Research

It is recommended that similar studies or studies of this nature, be conducted in other provinces in South Africa. These studies should also be repeated in the KZN province as students expectations and perceptions are constantly changing. This study used and applied the SERVQUAL model as instrument to assess student expectations and perceptions towards FET colleges in KZN. It is important to note that, during the data collection, students wanted to express their feelings more appropriately, and thus a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews, would be valuable.

Future studies are recommended, based on student expectations and perceptions of this sector which will consider factors, such as part-time, distance, setas and students with disabilities, which were excluded from this study, due to time-frame constraints. Future research could also be done on the topic of FET college employees' perceptions (particularly administration and lecturing staff) towards FET college management, in assessing internal communication breakdown with the aim of improving the service quality dimension in the FET sector.

6.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlighted student expectations and perceptions towards FET colleges, with respect to making a decision as to their college of choice in KZN. The aspects of service quality dimensions and gap scores, within the FET service sector, were analysed and discussed. This underlines the importance of assessing students as customers, in terms of what students expect and perceive about FET colleges. The appropriate implementation of service quality standards, as the paramount understanding to these, would appropriately position the FET sector to be the institution of first choice.

By constantly assessing service quality, in line with the service dimensions, and establishing each organisation's internal weaknesses and strength, the findings assure customer (students) satisfaction that can lead to an increase in market population (student numbers).

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ANNEXURE A

kzn education
Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar Tel: 033 341 8610 Ref.:2/4/8/130

Mr Sbongiseni Nelson Mbambo
No 404 Corlo Court Building
18 Heswall Road
Durban
4001

Dear Mr. Mbambo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **Student Expectations and Perceptions about the Merged Further Education and Training Colleges and their Relationship to College Choice in KZN,** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The Period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 September 2011to 01 September 2012.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please not that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following Schools and Institutions:

10.1	Esayidi FET College	10.4	Majuba FET College	10.7	Thekwini FET College
10.2	Coastal FET College	10.5	Mnambithi FET College	10.8	Umfolozi FET College
10.3	Elangeni FET College	10.6	Mthashana FET College	10.9	Umgungundlovu FET College

[redacted]

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education

23 / 12 / 04
Date

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POSTAL : Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
PHYSICAL: Office G 25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, Pietermaritzburg 3201
TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610 | Fax: +27 33 3341 8612 | E-mail: sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za |
Web: www.kzneducation.gov.za

ANNEXURE B

404 Corlo Court Building
No18 Hasewall Road
Durban
4000

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Student Expectations and Perceptions about Further Education and Training with respect to college of choice in KwaZulu-Natal

Dear participant,

I am currently undertaking a research project that aims to:

- To identify expectations of students towards FET;
- To identify perceptions of students towards FET;
- To identify factors influencing enrolments in FET; and
- To identify demographic differences according to expectations and perceptions in FET.

Would you agree to be interviewed for the study? The interview will take approximately (15) minutes. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The information you give will only be used for research purposes, and your identity and individual answers will be kept totally confidential. Should you wish to discuss this further please feel free to contact me or my supervisor (Prof R. B. Mason on**:** 031 373 5385 rogerm@dut.ac.za or IREC Administrator Lavisha Deonarian: 031 373 2900 LavishaD@dut.ac.za).

Your assistance will be much appreciated,

Yours faithfully,

S.N. Mbambo
072 1639 073 sbonelson@gmail.com

Please complete the following as confirmation of your willingness to participate in this research project:
I,……..……, have adequately discussed the study with the researcher, understand that I may withdraw from it at any time without giving reasons, and voluntarily agree to participate by being interviewed.
.
Signature: ……. Date: .....

ANNEXURE C

404 Corlo Court Building
No18 Hasewall Road
Durban
4000

1 November 2011

ATT: The Rector

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Letter of Consent: To interview students

To whom it may concern

I'm Sbongiseni Nelson Mbambo pursuing Master's Degree in (Marketing) at Durban University of Technology. Currently, I'm conducting a research for my master's degree. The topic for this research is on student expectations and perceptions regarding merged FET colleges, and their relationship to college choice in KZN. The aim for this is to explore and examine student expectations and perceptions about FET colleges with relationship to college of their choices.

The researcher will interview students from the National Vocational Certificate (NC v) and National Technical Education (NATED) groups, from various rural and urban areas in FET College Campuses.

I hereby request your consent and support in conducting this research. The commencement dates of such processes will be forwarded in the due course. Kindly be assured that the information from the students will be used for research purpose, and student identity and responses will be treated confidential.

Your cooperation and assistance will be highly appreciated in this regard.

Thank you

S. N. Mbambo (Mr) 0721639073/0865152666 Fax
20925965 Student Number: sbonelson@gmail.com

ANNEXURE D

Section A

Questionnaire Survey

Survey to examine student expectations and perceptions toward Further Education and Education with respect to college choice in KZN

PLEASE TAKE FEW MINUTES TO FILL IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK IN YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CHOSEN FET COLLEGE.

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Race

African ☐ Coloured ☐ Indian ☐ White ☐

3. Age Group

18-19 ☐ 20-21 ☐ 22-23 ☐ 24+ ☐

4. Please indicate highest qualification before registering at FET

Grade 9 ☐ Grade 10 ☐ Grade 11 ☐ Grade 12 ☐ Other ☐

5. How are you paying for your studies at FET?

Parents ☐ Bursary ☐ NSFAS ☐ Loan ☐

6. Which N level are you registered for at FET?

N1 ☐ N2 ☐ N3 ☐ N4 ☐

N5 ☐ N6 ☐ Not doing N level ☐

7. Which Level at NCV are you registered for at FET?

Level 2 ☐ Level 3 ☐ Level 4 ☐ Not doing NCV ☐

Expectations	SA	S	N	D	SD	Perception	SA	A	N	D	SD
Excellent FET college will have modern looking equipment.						FET's colleges have modern looking equipment.					
The physical facilities at excellent FET college will be visually appealing.						FET college physical facilities are visually appealing.					
Employees at excellent FET college will be neat-appearing.						FET college staff are neat-appearing.					
Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually at an excellent FET college.						Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing FET college.					
When excellent FET college promise to do something by certain time, they do.						When FET promises to do something by certain time, it does so.					
When a student has a problem, excellent FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it.						When you have a problem, FET shows a sincere interest in solving it.					
Excellent FET college will perform the service right the first time.						FET college performs the service right the first time.					
Excellent FET college will provide the service at the time they promise, they promise to do so.						FET college provides it service, at the time it promises to do so.					
Excellent FET will insist on error free records.						FET college insist on error free-records.					
Employees of excellent FET college will tell students exactly when services will be performed.						Employees at FET colleges tell you exactly when services will be performed.					
Employees of excellent FET college will give prompt service to students.						Employees of FET college give you prompt service.					
Employees of excellent FET college will always be willing to help students.						Employees of FET college are always willing to help you.					
Employees of excellent FET college will never be too busy to respond to students' requests.						Employees of FET college are never to be too busy to respond to your requests.					
The behavior of employees in Excellent FET college will instill confidence in students.						The behavior of employees in FET college instills confidence in you.					
Students of excellent FET college will feel safe in their transactions.						You feel safe in your transactions with FET college.					
Employees of excellent FET college will be consistently courteous with students.						Employees in FET college are consistently courteous with you.					
Employees of excellent FET college will have the knowledge to answer students' questions.						Employees in FET college have the knowledge to answer your questions.					
Excellent FET college will give students individual attention.						FET college gives you individual attention.					
Excellent FET college will have operating hours convenient to all their students.						FET college has operating hours convenient to all it students.					
Excellent FET college will have employees who give students personal attention.						FET college has employees who give you personal attention.					
Excellent FET college will have their students' best interest at heart.						FET college has your best interest at heart.					
The employee of excellent FET will understand the specific needs of their students.						Employee at FET college understand your specific needs.					

ANNEXURE E

	Gender	Race	Age	Highest qualification before registering at FET	How are you paying for your studies at FET?	Which N level are you registered for at FET?	Which Level of NCV are you registered for at FET?
Excellent FET college will have modern looking equipment_E	.204	.147	.228	.027*	.033*	.122	.034*
Excellent FET college will have modern looking equipment_P	.472	.068	.096	.741	.276	.001*	.036*
The physical facilities at excellent FET college will be visually appealing_E	.744	.082	.882	.376	.036*	.565	.538
The physical facilities at excellent FET college will be visually appealing_P	.690	.021*	.270	.673	.062	.398	.087
Employees at excellent FET college will be neat-appearing_E	.257	.852	.135	.040*	.078	.629	.051
Employees at excellent FET college will be neat-appearing_P	.022*	.888	.010*	.189	.002*	.454	.564
Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually at an excellent FET college_E	.109	.509	.130	.313	.016*	.307	.049*
Material associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) will be visually at an excellent FET college_P	.442	.473	.113	.166	.395	.147	.011*
When excellent FET college promise to do something by certain time, they do_E	.334	.724	.380	.283	.412	.112	.023*
When excellent FET college promise to do something by certain time, they do_P	.304	.955	.040*	.079	.016*	.192	.040*
When a student has a problem, excellent FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it_E	.225	.403	.763	.088	.142	.335	.023*
When a student has a problem, excellent FET college will show a sincere interest in solving it_P	.257	.418	.785	.722	.183	.050	.016*
Excellent FET college will perform the service right the first time_E	.979	.593	.884	.166	.757	.059	.133
Excellent FET college will perform the service right the first time_P	.623	.452	.321	.122	.944	.301	.216
Excellent FET college will provide the service at the time they promise, they promise to do so_E	.499	.749	.648	.190	.051	.007*	.212
Excellent FET college will provide the service at the time they promise, they promise to do so_P	.758	.694	.278	.901	.466	.153	.466
Excellent FET will insist on error free records_E	.876	.565	.635	.247	.746	.002*	.019*
Excellent FET will insist on error free records_P	.630	.204	.106	.020*	.608	.067	.121
Employees of excellent FET college will tell students exactly when services will be performed_E	.289	.608	.610	.262	.389	.537	.341
Employees of excellent FET college will tell students exactly when services will be performed_P	.832	.607	.200	.364	.267	.387	.328
Employees of excellent FET college will give prompt service to students_E	.696	.464	.714	.887	.026*	.009*	.411
Employees of excellent FET college will give prompt service to students_P	.939	.107	.969	.108	.106	.754	.108
Employees of excellent FET college will always be willing to help students_E	.505	.645	.518	.997	.006*	.130	.674
Employees of excellent FET college will always be willing to help students_P	.311	.342	.691	.125	.236	.407	.093

Employees of excellent FET college will never be too busy to respond to students' requests_E	.397	.437	.927	.424	.073	.021*	.547
Employees of excellent FET college will never be too busy to respond to students' requests_P	.619	.132	.689	.068	.297	.621	.067
The behavior of employees in Excellent FET college will instill confidence in students_E	.300	.564	.179	.771	.148	.019*	.424
The behavior of employees in Excellent FET college will instill confidence in students_P	.890	.174	.250	.406	.137	.277	.067
Students of excellent FET college will feel safe in their transactions_E	.730	.732	.891	.256	.013*	.186	.216
Students of excellent FET college will feel safe in their transactions_P	.300	.518	.124	.393	.030*	.408	.166
Employees of excellent FET college will be consistently courteous with students_E	.888	.930	.913	.251	.219	.132	.032*
Employees of excellent FET college will be consistently courteous with students_P	.816	.011*	.809	.074	.770	.007*	.105
Employees of excellent FET college will have the knowledge to answer students' questions_E	.577	.797	.717	.235	.365	.394	.966
Employees of excellent FET college will have the knowledge to answer students' questions_P	.451	.876	.488	.300	.995	.473	.058
Excellent FET college will give students individual attention_E	.919	.610	.513	.613	.705	.378	.023*
Excellent FET college will give students individual attention_P	.378	.918	.675	.893	.060	.011*	.026*
Excellent FET college will have operating hours convenient to all their students_E	.578	.565	.509	.711	.126	.000*	.090
Excellent FET college will have operating hours convenient to all their students_P	.670	.177	.226	.736	.547	.070	.675
Excellent FET college will have employees who give students personal attention_E	.173	.128	.767	.236	.005*	.429	.602
Excellent FET college will have employees who give students personal attention_P	.213	.004*	.684	.041*	.069	.322	.698
Excellent FET college will have their students' best interest at heart_E	.265	.268	.894	.454	.182	.091	.227
Excellent FET college will have their students' best interest at heart_P	.966	.197	.898	.217	.299	.231	.063
The employee of excellent FET will understand the specific needs of their students_E	.563	.166	.743	.674	.931	.130	.381
The employee of excellent FET will understand the specific needs of their students_P	.884	.320	.751	.495	.231	.302	.295

ALL VALUES WITH A * ARE SIGNIFICANT